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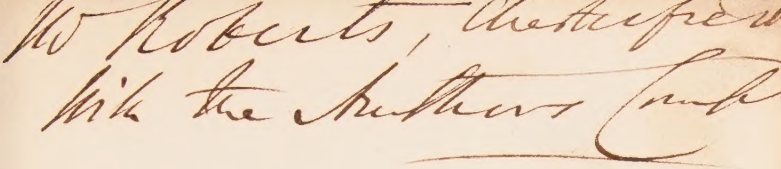

ROOKWOOD:

A ROMANCE.

I see how Ruin, with a palsied hand,
Begins to shake our ancient house to dust.
YORKSHIRE TRAGEDY.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LONDON:
RICHARD BENTLEY, NEW BURLINGTON STREET.
(SUCCESSOR TO HENRY COLBURN.)
1834.

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27, Old Bond St.
29th April 1834.

My dear Sir

I now redeem the promise I made you one time ago and forward you a copy of Rookwood, in hopes that you will feel much obliged by your noticing it in the Sheffield Courier. The early portion of the work was written in your house. — but I think you will find Turpin's ride to York in the 3d Volume (Book IV) the most suitable to your columns. — I should be glad if you could

Please to send me a
paper to my address.

a few of the verses. With
best thanks for
Believe me
Dear Sir
Yours truly
W. H. Ainsworth

If my advertisement has
appeared in C. Courier for any
insertion as on the other
side or the following week.
The work will only be published
here on Saturday next. You
will please your town Agent to call
for the Amount —

TO HIS MOTHER

THESE VOLUMES

ARE DEDICATED BY THE AUTHOR

WITH EVERY SENTIMENT OF

LOVE AND VENERATION.

ROOKWOOD.

BOOK I.

The Wedding Ring.

It has been observed, and I am apt to believe that it is an observation that will generally be found true, that before a terrible truth comes to light, there are certain murmuring whispers fly before it, and prepare the minds of men for the reception of the truth itself.

GALLICK REPORTS.

Case of the Count St. Geran.

BOOK THE FIRST.

CHAPTER I.

I saw great Satan like a sexton stand
With his intolerable spade in hand.

CHARLES LAMB.

WITHIN the deep recesses of a vault, the last abiding place of an ancient family—many generations of whose long line were there congregated—and at midnight's dreariest hour, two figures might be discovered, sitting, wrapt in silence as profound as that of the multitudinous dead around them. Beings of this nether world they seemed, yet so moveless was the attitude of each, so breathless the repose maintained, and so

shadowy and fantastical the appearance of the figures themselves, as imperfectly revealed in the *clair-obscur*, occasioned by the light of a single candle struggling with the gloom, that had any human eye gazed upon them, the impression produced upon the spectator's mind would doubtless have been (if, perchance, with less of superstition, he had not put a construction equally horrible upon the meeting), that the objects he beheld were embodied spirits of the departed, tenanting the spot, which had burst the leaden bondage of the tomb, and were still hovering nigh the place of their imprisonment.

So far as it could be discerned, the cemetery was of antique construction, and of no inconsiderable extent; its walls and roof were of solid stone masonry, the latter rising in a wide semicircular arch; to it might be the height of some seventeen feet, measured from the centre of the ceiling to the ground floor. The sides of the sepulchre

were subdivided, by thin walls of stone, into ranges of low, narrow, but deep compartments, adapted to the reception of the dead. The entrance to each recess consisted of a door-way, surmounted by small, obtusely-pointed arches, resting upon slender pillars, also of stone; the spandrils between each being filled up with a variety of escutcheons, shields, and other trophies and inscriptions, relating to the occupants of each particular cell. There were no doors to these recesses; and within might be traced huge heaps of coffins, reared pile upon pile, the accumulation of ages, packed with a prodigality worthy of a miser's stores, one upon another, till the floor groaned with the weight of lead; and in some instances the lower layers had been crushed and flattened by the superincumbent mass. Numerous, however, as were these receptacles, the proportion of bodies exceeded their capabilities; and in the further extremity there was an additional range of coffins, which could not be included in the cells,

encroaching upon the limits of the vault, and attesting, by their increase, the dread ravages of the Destroyer.

Depending from a hook, fixed in one of the stone pillars previously described, hung a rack of old time-out-of-mind hatchments, seemingly placed there in solemn mockery of the sunken greatness, the fall whereof they so eloquently bespoke. Stained and tarnished was their once flaunting emblazonry—tattered and threadbare their once spotless quarterings—even their triumphant "*Resurgam*" was obliterated and effaced, as if Hope itself had been annihilated.

Another remarkable feature of this phantasmagorical picture should be noticed. In the centre of the chamber loomed the ghostly outline of the erect effigies of an armed warrior, Sir Ranulph Rookwood, the builder of the mausoleum, and the founder of the family that slept the sleep of death within its walls. Wrought in black marble, of the size of life, this stern, and sable statue, of rare workmanship, and great

antiquity, differed from most monumental sculpture, in that the posture chosen for the warlike figure was erect and life-like, not recumbent and supine. The warrior was represented as sheathed in a complete suit of plate armour, decorated with the armorial surcoat, and grasping the pummel of a weighty curtal axe, his usual weapon of defence; a conically-formed helmet rested upon his gloomy brow, revealing his harsh but commanding features; the golden spur of knighthood was on his heel, and beneath, enshrined in a costly marble sarcophagus, rested the mortal remains of what had once been one of the "sternest knights to his mortal foe that ever put speare in the rest."

The effect of the light, or light and shade, within the vault, must not pass unobserved.

> Darkness with light so daringly doth fight,
> That each, confounding other, both appear
> As darkness light, and light but darkness were*.

Stuck in a rusty sconce against one of the columns overhead, the flickering candle in-

* Drayton.

effectually contending with the dank, heavy atmosphere that pervaded this house of death, not only lent additional duskiness to the depths its rays were unable to penetrate, but increased the apparent size of the tomb, producing the strangest combinations, and multiplying the images of horror a hundred fold, by giving ample range and scope for the most hideous speculations.

Streaming in a wavering, transverse line upon the ribbed roof, the yellow flare partially fell upon the human figures, before alluded to, throwing them into bold, black relief, and casting their opaque, fantastical shadows along the slabbed floor. Dilated, in the darkling twilight, to gigantic proportions, the marble form of the Knight received a gleam of the same lustre, which, striking more particularly upon the grim features, communicated to the rigid aspect a wild and terrible expression. Coupled with the other group, and in connection with the awful scene, the figure might be likened

to a knight of romance, in the act of bursting some spell of hell-engendered sorcery; or it might be compared to one of those mystic, warrior creations that are said to watch perpetually the never-failing lamps that burn at the tombs of the true Disciples of the Rosy Cross, ready to quench their flame for ever, should unhallowed footsteps approach.

Covered with a mouldering pall, and laid upon a bier, an old oaken coffin served the two parties for a seat; between them stood a bottle and a glass; the latter, although emptied of its contents, giving token, from the perfume that "hung round it still," of the most pellucid, but not least potent, of spirituous distilments; and showing, that whatever might be the object of this stealthy communion, the comfort of the creature had not been altogether overlooked. At the feet of one of the personages, were laid a mattock, a spade, a horn lantern, a bunch of keys, and some other matters symbolical of his vocation, together with a little bristly, black-and-

tan terrier, curled up like a hedgehog beside him. He was, apparently, a very old man, with a bald head, hoar as the summit of Mont Blanc, and partially protected from the cold by that description of woollen caxon, vulgarly denominated a Welch wig. His elbow rested upon his knees, his wrist supported his chin, and his grey, glassy eyes, glimmering like marsh meteors in the candle-light, were fixed upon his companion with a glance of keen, searching scrutiny, worthy of a cynic philosopher.

The object of his investigation, a much more youthful and interesting person, seemed lost in the depths of reverie, and alike insensible to time, place, and the object of the meeting. With both hands grasped round the barrel of a fowling piece, and with his face leaning upon the same support, the features were entirely concealed from view; the light, too, being to the back, and shedding its rays *over*, rather than upon his person, aided his disguise. Yet, even thus imperfectly defined, the outline of the head, and

proportions of the figure, were eminently striking and symmetrical.

Attired in a rough, savage costume, a sort of dark-green *chasseur*, or sporting dress, of the fashion of George the Second's day (the period of our Tale), perpetrated in such wise, as might be expected, from the hands of some untutored, rustic professor of the shears—attired then in a forester's dress, of the roughest texture and rudest make, his wild garb would have determined his rank as but lowly in the scale of society, had not a certain loftiness of manner, and bold, though reckless deportment, argued pretensions, on the part of the wearer, to a more elevated station in life, and contradicted, in a great measure, the impression produced by the homely appearance of his habiliments.

A cap of shaggy brown fur, fancifully but not ungracefully formed, covered his head, from beneath which, dropping in natural clusters over his neck and shoulders, a cloud of blackest hair escaped. Subsequently, when his face was more

fully revealed, it proved to be that of a young man, of dark aspect, and grave, melancholy expression of countenance, approaching even to the stern, when at rest; but sufficiently animated and earnest when engaged in conversation, or otherwise excited; then was it lighted by a pair of flashing eyes, that showered fire, like electric sparkles from a full-charged cloud. His features were regular, delicately formed, and might be characterized as singularly beautiful, were it not for a want of roundness in the *contour* of the face, occasioned, possibly, by care, anxiety, over-exertion, want of repose, &c., any, or all combined, which gave the lineaments a thin, *worn* look, totally distinct, however, from haggardness or emaciation; some such countenance as an active, abstemious Hindoo might be supposed to possess, wherein there was no superfluous flesh. The nose was delicate and fine; the nostril especially so, keen and sensitive as that of an Arabian with a pedigree of a thousand years; the upper lip short, curling, graceful, and

haughtily expressive. As to complexion, his skin had a truly Spanish warmth and intensity of colouring; the tint might have originated in stain of juicy herb, or root, or from exposure to the sun and "skiey influences," with certain native aids to boot; but the result was an embrowned swarthiness of hue that would have done credit to the tawniest Gitano of Andalusia, even with the true Morisco blood purpling in his veins. His form, when raised, was tall and masculine, and though slight, exhibited great personal vigour, and muscular resources, and but for the recklessness of manner, and unrestrained carriage and deportment before noticed, his appearance might be designated as prepossessing and attractive in the extreme.

We have before remarked, that at the precise moment whence our narrative commences, both parties were stirless, hushed, and still; not a word was spoken by either—scarce a breath drawn. It was a silence befitting the place. In the mean time we shall take advantage of the pause (as it must evidently have been), to hazard

a slight preliminary account of the old man, with the great, grey, glassy eyes.

Peter Bradley, of Rookwood, in the county of York, where he had exercised the vocation of sexton, for the best part of a life already drawn out to the full span ordinarily allotted to mortality, was one of those odd, grotesque, bizarre caricatures of humanity, which it occasionally delighteth our inimitable George Cruikshank to limn. So attenuated in the region of the legs and arms, as scarcely to remove him from absolute identity with the skeleton society he so much affected, Peter's unnatural length and lankiness of limb, combined and contrasted with his round dropsical-looking paunch, puffed out to a very pincushion plumpness, made him no inapt representative of a huge, bloated, and overgrown spider. Totally destitute of hair, his bald head reminded one of a bleached scull, allowing for the wrinkled furrows in the forehead, and thick beetle brows, that projected like the eaves of a barn; his hands were lean, long, and skinny, as the Ancient Mariner's; his

fingers spread out like claws. After all, his eyes were his most remarkable feature; "like the toad, ugly and venemous, he bore a precious jewel in his head;" and, like that noxious reptile, his eyes were large, lambent, and luminous, though cold as the fire of an *ignis fatuus*, and grey as the slaty hue of earliest day-break;—and then his laugh! that hollow chuckling laugh, distinguishable from all other laughter by an occasional wheezing choke, which threatened, during its paroxysm, to terminate the existence and merriment of the cachinnator, one and the same time; this laugh had, besides, something so horrible about it, that, though seldom heard, it never failed, when indulged in, to excite a shuddering response in the auditor, whoever the luckless wight might be. It was a something between the gibbering of a ghoul and the grin of an hyæna.

The inward man corresponded with his outward appearance. His soul was in his spade. He was essentially a man of graves—"of the

earth, earthy;" of the dead, deathly. Habitual contact with the mould, and with the mouldering, had, so to speak, mildewed and worm-eaten his better sensibilities, crusting his mind "as with a scurf," and turning the wholesome current of his blood to black and melancholic bile. Something akin to nothingness he seemed, and yet endowed with animation—a connecting link betwixt the breathing body and the bony corpse—Materiality and Immateriality in one.

> The night-mare Life in Death was he,
> Who thicks men's blood with cold.

The churchyard might be called his domain—the tomb his dwelling-place—the charnel-house his museum of rarities; and he displayed as intimate an acquaintance with the relics of the latter, as his brother of the spade did with the scull of that "mad rogue Yorick, the king's jester;" and exhibited as much assurance in affixing a name or a date to a "chapless mazzard," or fragmentary bone, as any *savan* of

them all could do in illustrating the fossil tusk of a mammoth, the giant jaw of the mastodon, or other incomprehensible remnant of the extinct creation of the Antediluvian World.

Some other peculiarities had Peter Bradley, which we shall leave to be developed in the course of our story, contenting ourselves with the mention of one faculty which he was supposed to enjoy; the possession of which made him an object of no little apprehension to the habitants of Rookwood, and the neighbourhood;—this was the power of predicting the approach of death. How he acquired this faculty was matter of abundant conjecture, and had never been satisfactorily explained; or rather the explanations offered had left people more in the dark than before. Some said that long practice enabled him to detect a *moribund* subject at a glance—that, like the vulture, he could scent his prey from afar—and that his predictions were doom;—others, that being familiar with hobgoblins, spectres, and all sorts of devilry, he

gained his knowledge from such unholy association; and, consequently, was little better than a wizard, or sorcerer, and ought to be treated as such, and burnt at the stake, or at least ducked in a blanket;—that his lone, and long, midnight vigils in the church porch, could be for no good, or christian-like purpose—nay, they even went on to say, that he had entered into a compact with the King of Terrors, to furnish food for his insatiate maw, on condition of his own personal exemption. Others, more sceptical, thought there was nothing marvellous in the case. With them Peter was no prophet—people were fools to be frightened, and die, only because he said they would do so; they ought to recover, if only to prove him in error. Be this as it may, whenever there was an occasional instance of mortality in the parish (and sometimes it would so fall out), predicted or not, Peter had the credit of the catastrophe. Such was, and so ranked in men's esteem, Peter Bradley, of Rookwood, sexton in ordinary.

Wearied with the prolonged silence, Peter was the first to speak. His voice was harsh and grating, as a rusty hinge.

" Another glass," said he, pouring out a modicum of the pale fluid.

His companion shook his head.

" It will keep out the cold," continued the sexton, pressing the liquid; " and you, who are not so much accustomed as I am to the damps of a vault, may suffer from them. Besides," added he, sneeringly, " it will give you courage!"

" Courage!" echoed the other, raising his head, while the flash of his eye resented the implied reproach.

" Ay, courage!" retorted the sexton; " Nay, never stare at me so hard, man. I doubt neither your courage nor your firmness; but as both may be put to the test to-night, I see no great harm in making certainty sure; and therefore 'tis that I press the glass upon you. Well, as you please; I don't want to poison you—this is no doctor's stuff—no damned decoction, or

mixture, but honest, wholesome gin, distilled before you were born or thought of. 'Tis as harmless as mother's milk, and as mild; and so it should be, for it has lain more years in this vault than you can number to your head, grandson Luke; and time is a great improver of liquor, whatever it may be of men. Here in this vault, my cellar, as I call it, hath it been hoarded these two-and-thirty years. But if you won't drink, I will; so here goes. Ah! capital!" smacking his lips—"that flavour puts me in mind of a night I had here long ago."

"You must know, that when old Sir Reginald Rookwood was gathered to his fathers—there he lies—two-and-thirty years ago, as I said before (and a grand burial it was, that of Sir Piers, to-morrow night, will be nothing to it—nothing at all). Well, when the coffin had been lowered down, and the lights put out in the church, I crept back again to the vault, with three bottles under my arm, for I like society of a *certain sort*, but it must be my own choosing;

and I always think spirit has a keener relish in such an atmosphere as this. So I sat down, and swallowed glass after glass, bumper after bumper, and all to Sir Reginald's repose—ha! ha! I shall never forget how drunk I got; and, as the liquor mounted to my brain, how I laughed, and sung, and shouted, till the roof rang again. Rare revelling it was—ha! ha! and no lack of fellowship either—no lack of boon companions; for as my head reeled, and my eyes danced, it seemed as if the dead, men and women, in their shrouds and sere-clothes, came thronging about me, jesting and jabbering, laughing as I laughed, singing in screaming chorus, and dancing and whirling round me till it made me giddy to look at them—such white grinning faces had they—so horribly distorted by their laughter. At last they all broke into a wild hullabaloo; there was a stir amongst the grisly company, and up rose grey, old Sir Reginald, whom I had just buried; he seemed strange at first, and distant, with his

phantom friends, but soon became more reconciled; and then his three ghostly wives—for he had three in his lifetime—darted towards him, and wound their bony arms around his neck, in a way that must have certainly strangled him had any life been left; and they kissed his livid lips —pah!—Well! at last he perceived me, and nodded; so I pledged him a brimmer—and then, all at once, fell back, as if struck with a shot right through the heart. Ha! ha! *that* was a night! Out of the three bottles I then brought with me, this is the last: I stowed it away in one of the niches, and there it has remained ever since. This is a famous cellar for keeping liquors in; but, for fear of accidents, as I've not been here for some time latterly, and may not often come again, I'll not throw away the bottle while the screw's at hand; and, as the first was drained to his father's memory, why, be this quaffed to the son. Here's to the rest eternal of Sir Piers Rookwood. You'll say amen to that pledge,

Luke, or you're no grandchild of mine;"—and having once again emptied the beaker, he replenished it, and handed it to his grandson.

"To his eternal damnation!" fiercely exclaimed Luke—and seizing the glass, he dashed it to fragments upon the coffin lid.

The crash of the broken glass was instantly succeeded by a noise like that of rattling bones, proceeding from the coffin whereupon the speakers sat. It seemed as the dead within, whose repose had been thus wantonly violated, were about to arise, and avenge the insult offered to his sanctuary. Luke recoiled in horror at the sound: a clammy moisture burst from out his pores.

"What means this?" he faltered.

"'Tis but a rat," returned the sexton, grinning contemptuously; "thou art safe, it will not harm thee. Thou hast not learned the art of raising a spirit yet, though it seems thou can'st lay other people's spirits and thine own without tutorship:" and, chuckling at his own conceit, he

applied his knuckles to the lid. A smart rap proved the truth of his assertion. A monstrous grave-rat sprang from a hole underneath the coffin, and was immediately killed by the dog. "Well done, Mole," cried the sexton. "I tell thee what, Luke," added he, turning to his grandson, who was sullenly gazing at the dog, "the next time thou art in the mood for blaspheming, I trust thou wilt not exercise thyself at the expense of my glasses, and good liquor. Thy fright may teach thee better conduct in future. Marry, but thou art a pious son, and speakest with becoming reverence of thy dead father!"

"Why should I reverence his memory," answered Luke, bitterly, "who showed no fatherly love for me? He disowned *me* in life—in death I disown *him*. Sir Piers Rookwood was no father of mine."

"He had at least the reputation of being so; but thou art, doubtless, better informed," returned the sexton, "than I can possibly be on a

subject that so nearly concerns thyself. Whose son art thou, then?"

"Whose? Do I hear thee ask the question?"

"Certainly you do, and repeat it; Whose son art thou?"

"Thy daughter's, Susan Bradley?"

"That I know; but thy father?—for I presume thou hadst a father,"—asked the sexton, with a diabolical grin.

"Accursed fiend!" muttered Luke, "since it must be, and thou hast said it, he was my reputed father. Father!—ha! the name sounds strange in my ears; and with Sir Piers 'twas but the name, and not the heart."

"He was as surely thy father, as Susan Bradley, thy mother, was my daughter," rejoined the sexton.

"And, surely," cried Luke, impetuously, "*thou* needst not boast of the connection!—'Tis not for thee, old man, to couple their names together—to exult in thy daughter's disgrace and thine own dishonour! Shame—shame—speak

not of them in the same breath, if thou wouldst not have me invoke curses on the dead. I would be at peace with him now."

"Reverential prayers and tears were fitter, methinks, than curses from thy lips," persisted the sexton, anxious to rankle the wound which he perceived he had inflicted, "a theme like the present."

"Prayers and tears!" vociferated Luke, "my prayers would turn to curses, my tears to blood! I have no reverence (whatever thou may'st have) for the seducer—for the murderer of my mother."

"Murderer!" repeated the sexton, apparently startled, and affecting astonishment—"Thou hast choice store of epithets; Sir Piers a murderer!"

"Tush!" answered Luke, indignantly, "pretend not to be ignorant. Thou hast better knowledge of the truth or falsehood of the dark tale that has gone abroad respecting my mother's fate than I have; and unless report has belied you

foully, have had substantial reasons for keeping sealed lips on the subject. This you know best yourself; you will answer for it hereafter, if you have bartered eternal justice for unrighteous gold. But whether she died of a broken heart, broken by his perfidy—whether she fell a victim to remorse—to despair—her crushed spirit sinking under the pressure of penitential sorrow for her crime, a crime of which he was the author and origin—whether more subtle and efficient means were taken to remove her—may rest in doubt, vague and uncertain as are hopes hereafter. Yet thus much is assured; namely, that he, Sir Piers Rookwood, was the primary cause of her death; and in effect, if not in intent, her destroyer."

"Sorrow never broke Susan's heart," said the sexton, with a ghastly grin; "die as she might, she died impenitent."

"Her sin then rest with him—her blood cries out for vengeance."

"Vengeance belongeth to the Lord," quoth the sexton. "Leave Sir Piers to settle his account elsewhere. I warrant me he will not want thy assistance to help him towards the brink of the pit that is bottomless. And now, seeing that he has thrown off this mortal coil, and hath never a word to say in his defence, or power to act in offence—though I grant that during life he showed thee no great sympathy, no marked paternal attention, such as a youth in thy situation was entitled to claim—for he knew thou wert his son—yet, considering that he is gone, bury thy hatred with him; let not thy anger reach beyond the grave. Say thou forgivest him."

"For myself, I could forgive him; nay, more, I *do*. May God forgive his injuries to me; but for *her*—"

"And why except *her*? why not extend thy grace for her? Both are dead and gone, and the day will surely come when both will be adjudged. Abide thee that time in patience, for it availeth

thee little now, fume and fret as thou wilt. From thy hand she is now safe at least. And one thing I will tell thee, that I, who have seen Sir Piers at times, when no other eye but my own and that of heaven has looked upon him, and when he knew not of my presence, can avouch, that if remorse, and penitence, and suffering, may serve to expiate a sinner's offences, he is not utterly without the pale of mercy."

"Grant it may be so. For myself, I freely and fully forgive him; though to me he hath ever been the worst of foes—the fellest of enemies — the most unrelenting of persecutors—wronging me at my very birth—injuring me on the threshold of existence, and branding me with the foul stamp of illegitimacy. Yet, believing that to him I owe my being, for all the slights, for all the contumely, for all the persecutions I have endured at his hands while living, I forgive him dead—*my* wrongs I bury with him."

"Why, that is right, and fairly spoken, though thou art still far from a fair understanding of

thy case, grandson Luke, and givest vent to idle vauntings for imaginary wrongs. Listen, while I expound it to thee. It seems that thou holdest it in high dudgeon that Sir Piers should have any share in thy paternity at all, and certainly it was no great good, either to thyself or to him, that he had so; but as it hath occurred, contrary to the inclinations of both parties, e'en let it pass. Thou art a brave lad, and never the worse for thy illegitimacy."

"In thy opinion——"

"Ay, or in that of any other person of discrimination. It is no disparagement to thee, if thou couldst only think so. Thou art a lad of spirit, and shouldst be superior to vulgar prejudices. Illegitimacy — how can it harm thee? Art thou less active, less able, less energetic, less enterprising? Hast thou fewer faculties than any one begotten in lawful wedlock? Art thou a whit less capable of aught becoming manhood? And as to the reproach, that exists but in the opinion of the world, and, as such, should be

lightly esteemed. Oh! Luke, you want a little of my philosophy sadly. Mark the difference between us: Sir Piers makes love to my daughter Susan—seduces her——"

"Blisters upon thy tongue."

"Be calm; hear me to the end. Seduces her, I say; an act I am not going to defend; far be it from me to do so; but neither do I view it in the peevish light thou dost—no, my philosophy comes in aid——"

"Philosophy!" repeated Luke, with scorn.

"I reflect," continued the man of graves, without noticing the interruption, "upon the difference of our station in life; how natural it is that a weak, vain, country lass, like Susan, should be tempted and fall, and that Sir Piers had no especial exemption from the passions incident to man. It is human nature—frail, erring, human nature, but human nature still. I would rather it had not been so, but I blame neither party; and as to the dishonour which thou sayest

attaches to me, I think I have sufficiently manifested my disregard of what the world esteems dishonour, to make it necessary to repeat my utter contempt, if, indeed, dishonour could ever attach to one like me. I never was sensitive on the subject. As to thee, I hold thee to be as much my grandson, as if thou wert absolutely of the right line; nay, am prouder of thee, as Sir Piers's bastard, than if thou wert lawful issue of some honest hind."

"No more of this."

"One thing more, and I have done. 'Tis long since I have seen thee; never since thou wert a mere brat; but I have often heard of thee, and learnt, to my surprise, from one of thy gipsy friends, that thou wert in this neighbourhood yesterday. Thy roving life has prevented all friendly intercourse betwixt us."

"Was that all that prevented it? Didst thou ever display any anxiety before this?"

"My surprise was great to see thee yesterday."

"Let it pass. I had no opportunity; but I have heard of thee often, in different ways, and of thy roving life, and wild exploits, and so has Sir Piers too, God help him! But what I was going to say was this: that thou art mistaken in attributing the persecutions thou hast endured to him; they were the work of another, in his name. He ever watched thy vagabond course with fearful interest, and could he have found thee at the last ——"

"He might have found me, had he wished it."

"How so—didst thou ever see him?"

"See him! I shunned him, as I would a pestilence. Twelve years have past since last I beheld him."

"The worse for thee. It was his wish to see thee; but no traces could be discovered of thee, when thou wert most wanted."

"Ha! ha! I baffled him, then."

"Baffled *him*—baffled thyself. Do I not tell thee Sir Piers wished to see thee for thy good. Thou hast lost much by thy folly."

"I care not if I have; but how was I to conjecture that Sir Piers was friendly disposed towards me. It hath ever appeared the contrary."

"But it was as I tell thee. The wrong thou complainest of was all another's work."

"What other?"

"His wife, the Lady Rookwood. You know her not, or you would not ask, but you may hereafter, and I would put you upon your guard, or she will ensnare you. The dead Sir Piers was your friend; your enemy yet survives, in Lady Rookwood. I tell thee, Luke, Jezabel was an angel of light, to that woman. She will go any lengths—she sticks at nothing; stand in her way, and mark the end of it. And then she is a match for the devil himself in cunning, as well as malice. Kindle her anger, and it will not burn out like a quick flame, as that of any decent person would. No; it smoulders, and smoulders in secret, till some sudden wind shall rise, and then—puff!—no end to the blaze and ruin. All thou hast endured, originated with her. She early learnt

the story of thy birth; I know not from whom, perhaps from Sir Piers; but from that moment, thou wert surely marked out as an object of her vengeance. Her engines were set to work. She drove thee hence; nay, twice, as Sir Piers himself told me, hath assailed thy life, but he foiled her horrible purposes."

"Am I to believe this?" asked Luke, with an expression of doubt.

"Assuredly! Poor Sir Piers; thou talkest of his having broken thy mother's heart; it was a fate himself 'scaped not, and at his own wife's hands."

"So my mother was avenged, I care not who was the instrument. There may be truth in what thou sayest, in regard to Lady Rookwood's enmity to me; most circumstances seem to warrant the belief; but devil as thou describest her, I doubt whether even she could have broke so stubborn a heart as that of her husband."

"Thou hast yet to know her. The hardest rock will yield to constant dropping. Sir Piers's

breast was no such flinty substance. Drop by drop, her biting words wore their way to his heart's core; the venom was slow in its effect, but sure. Needs't thou further proof—she is a widow!"

"And I am *motherless!*" added Luke, with bitter emphasis on the epithet.

CHAPTER II.

> Let me know fully, therefore, the intent
> Of this, thy dismal preparation—
> This talk fit for a charnel.
>
> WEBSTER.

THE acrimony with which Luke expressed himself brought the discourse to a termination. No reply was attempted by the sexton, who saw at once that any thing he could add would be unavailing, and that he had already trifled too much with his grandson's feelings. Luke rose from his seat, and, flinging his gun over his shoulder, began to pace the vault rapidly to and fro, bestowing a casual glance at each niche as he passed it, his tramp sounding dully on the floor, and his tall form now almost disappearing from

view—now suddenly rushing on the sight. Meanwhile the sexton was not without occupation. Busying himself in preparations for the melancholy ceremonial of the morrow, he beguiled the time with snatches of odd, out-of-the-way ditties, as strange and, as the night almost seem, as supernatural as himself, occasionally whistling a kind of accompaniment, with about as much fitness to the air as the latter itself bore to the ordinary standard of musical composition. In one of the intervals of this uncouth performance, Luke approached him, and asked—

"At what hour did Sir Piers Rookwood die?"

"He died on Thursday last, in the night time; but the exact hour I know not."

"Of what ailment?"

"Neither do I know that. His end was sudden, yet not without a warning sign."

"What warning?" inquired Luke.

"Neither more nor less than the death-omen of the house. You look astonished. Is it possible you have never heard of the ominous Lime

tree, and the fatal bough?—why, 'tis a common tale hereabouts, and has been for centuries: any old crone would tell it thee. Peradventure thou *hast* seen the old avenue of lime trees leading to the hall, near a quarter of a mile in length, and as noble a row of timber a ny in the county. Well, there is one tree—the st on the left hand before you come to the clock house—larger than all the rest—a huge piece of timber, with broad spreading branches, and of I know not what girth in the trunk. Ah! there is something fearful and portentous even in the look of the tree; its leaves have all a darker green than those of any others; its branches are flung out like the arms of a giant; and on wintry nights it will shriek in the tempests like a human being in agony. Some say it was planted in old times by Sir Ranulph, he who built the mansion, and designed the avenue, and whose statue stands before you; and that beneath its roots are scattered the bones of a witch, whom he hunted and worried with his blood-hounds,

denying Christian burial to the accursed remains. This is likely enough; but I have heard other traditions, not so probable; one of which runs, that the tree was originally a stake, which, driven through the body of a murderer, and nurtured in the soil, enriched and fattened with his blood, took root, and, contrary to the course of nature, flourished. This I heed not. One thing, however, is certain, that the tree is, in some mysterious manner, connected with the family of Rookwood, and immediately previous to the death of one of that line, a branch is sure to be shed from the parent stem, prognosticating his doom."

"And such an omen, thou wouldst add, preceded Sir Piers's demise," said Luke.

"Even so. No later than Tuesday morning," replied the sexton, "I happened to be sauntering down the avenue; I know not what took me thither at that early hour, but I rambled leisurely on till I came nigh the tree; and lo! there was a huge bough cumbering the ground, right

across my path: an adder would not have startled me so much. There it was, a green, strong branch, broken from the bole—no wind, no storm, no axe, had done it; so I stood still, and paused. Just then, as ill-luck would have it, with a loud, cheering cry, a burst of hounds, and a merry crew of friends at his heels, out gallops Sir Piers from the gate. Full tilt he comes towards me; when directly his horse rears at the branch, and out of his saddle he tumbles. He was not hurt by the fall, only startled; but more when he beheld the cause of the accident, than by any thing else. He put a bold face on the matter, but I could see it sickened him, and well it might—it was his death-warrant—I could see it in his face, even then. At first he stormed, and asked who had done it. Every body was questioned—all denied a hand in it. Hugh Badger, the keeper, held his horse, but he would not mount, and returned dejectedly to the hall, breaking up the day's sport. Before departing, he addressed a word or two to me in private

respecting thee, and pointed, with a melancholy shake of the head, to the branch: there was a thought of other days in his look. Doctor Titus Tyrconnel tried to cheer him, but it would not do; it was all over, his sand was run. Two days afterwards his doom was accomplished."

"And do you place faith in this idle legend?" asked Luke, with affected indifference, although it was evident, from his manner, that he himself was not so entirely free from a superstitious feeling of belief as he would have it appear.

"Undoubtedly I do," replied the sexton; "I were more difficult to be convinced than the unbelieving disciple else. Thrice hath it occurred to my own knowledge, and ever with the same result: firstly, with Sir Reginald; secondly, with thy own mother; and lastly, as I have just told thee, with Sir Piers."

"I thought ye had said, even now, that this death-omen, if such it be, was always confined to the immediate family of Rookwood, and not to mere inmates of the mansion."

"To the heads of that house, be they male or female."

"None other."

"None."

"Then how could it apply to her? Was *she* of that house? Was *she* a wife?"

"Who shall say she was *not?*" replied the sexton.

"Who shall say she *was?*" cried Luke, repeating the words with indignant emphasis—"Who will avouch *that?*"

"Perchance such a one might be found."

"Might! what new perplexity wouldst thou conjure up in a mind perplexed almost beyond endurance? If thou hast aught to say, speak out, and keep me not on the rack of doubt and suspense."

A smile played upon the sexton's countenance: it was cold as wintry sunbeam.

"I will bear this no longer," cried Luke; "anger me not, or look to yourself. In a word,

hast thou any thing to tell me respecting her? if not, let me be gone."

"I have; but I will not be hurried by a boy like thee," replied Peter, doggedly. "Go, if thou wilt, and take the consequences; my lips are shut for ever, and I have much to say—much thou wouldst gladly learn."

"Then out with it; why else came I hither? When you sought me out this morning, in my retreat with the gipsy gang, you bade me meet you in the church porch at midnight; I was true to my appointment."

"And I will keep my promise; sit down. Thou knowest where thou art; 'tis the burial place of the Rookwood family."

"I know it."

"Interrupt me not. What I have got to say concerns you, and your mother likewise, as you will find anon. Look around. See how each cell within this sepulchre is tenanted. The coffins swarm like chests in a store-house. Ah!

how much useful lead is wasted; better melt it down to good balls, and thin superfluous mankind, than keep it to preserve the rotten masses it contains; a few planks are all that is needed for the best of us: give me a deep grave, a thin board, and a gravelly soil. What is a churchyard for—eh?—But no matter, there they are, in all the honour dust can have—fathers and sons—leaden lumber all—lying in tiers of three and four, ay, and as many in places as five. Draw closer, that I may whisper in thine ear. Of every Rookwood that lies around us—and all that ever bore the name, except Sir Piers himself, who lies in state at the hall, are here—not one—mark what I say!—not one male branch of the house but has been suspected—"

"Of what?"

"Murder!" replied the sexton, in a hissing whisper.

"Murder!" re-echoed Luke, recoiling.

"There is one dark stain—one foul blot on all—blood—blood hath been spilt."

"By all?"

"Ay, and *such* blood! their's was no common crime. Even murder hath its degrees—their's was of the first class."

"Their wives—you cannot mean that?"

"Ay, their wives!—I do. Thou hast heard it then. Ha! ha! 'tis a trick they had. Didst ever hear the old saying? it's in every old crone's lips hereabouts:—

'Never mate brook would,
A Rook of the Rook wood.'

And a merry saying it is, and true; no woman ever stood in a Rookwood's way, but she was speedily removed, that's certain. They had all, save poor Sir Piers, the knack of stopping a troublesome woman's tongue, and practised it to perfection—a rare art, eh? As I told you before, yonder lies old Sir Reginald, with his three wives beside him—three—and he survived them all. Oh! he was a brave man; 'tis pity he could not teach his son. That coffin at the bottom of the pile, flattened like a piece of kneaded clay, con-

tains his first wife; she died of a blow dealt by her husband, at a time when women have most need of kindness: but Sir Reginald, though a great Courtier abroad was no flatterer at home—it was a kiss and a cuff with him. Notwithstanding this—for you will observe women are ever prone to wedlock, and think no man too hard to manage till they find out their mistake when too late—Sir Reginald married again, ay, and again after that—two other wives—*this* he wedded for her money, *that* for her beauty: the one he hated, that her looks did not please him; the other, that she inflamed him with jealousy. Both he removed, and died full of years and honours.

"Sir Ralph heads the niche beyond his son: he was a jovial man I've heard, for he was before my time, and loved his bottle and his lass; but he had a wife, and a jealous one, who must needs be meddling. Your jealous women are ever meddlesome. Better had it been for her had she taken no thought at his pastimes; but she must needs drive a wench out of the village

that Sir Ralph had taken a fancy to; and so one morning my Lady was found, a swollen corpse, in the fish pond. Sir Ralph swore lustily that she had done the deed herself—that she was an outrageous creature, and had drowned herself merely to malign him; but others thought otherwise, and he only escaped the gibbet to have his brains knock'd out in battle. Catch a Rookwood, if you can.

"Pass over the rest, and come to this side. There, in that old shell, lies Sir Ranulph, the second of that name, and grandson of the grim old knight of the marble monument. I never heard tell exactly how he disposed of the two dames with whom he allied himself; but both were wealthy, both short lived. His great anxiety, like Sir Reginald's, was to increase his patrimony, for he knew what the old saw says:—

"There's thriving in wiving; for when we bury
Wives by half dozens, the money makes merry."

And after he had rid himself of all incumbrances, he paid courtship to an heiress—but she took

the alarm at the fate of her predecessors, and the rumours that went abroad about them—"

"I have heard sufficient," interposed Luke; "what have the misdeeds of his ancestry to do with Sir Piers, much less with my mother, unless indeed—"

"Every thing. If he could not rid himself of his wife (and she were a match for the devil himself), it follows not that the mistress might be more readily set aside."

"Hast thou absolute knowledge of aught?" cried Luke, his voice tremulous with anxiety.

"Nay, I but hinted."

"Such hints are worse than open speech. Let me know the worst. Did he kill her?" And Luke stared at the sexton as if he would have looked into his secret soul.

But the sexton was not easily fathomed. His cold, bright eye returned Luke's gaze stedfastly, as he answered, composedly—

"I have said all I know."

"But not all thou *thinkest*."

"Thoughts should not always find their utterance in words, else should we often endanger our own safety, and that of others."

"An idle subterfuge; and from thee, worse than idle. I will have an answer, yea or nay. Was it poison—was it steel?"

"Neither."

"But there are other ways by which the spark of life may be extinguished."

"Enough—she died."

"No, not enough. When?—where?"

"In her sleep—in her bed."

"Why, that was natural."

A wrinkling smile crossed the sexton's brow.

"What means that horrible gleam of laughter?" exclaimed Luke, grasping his shoulder with such force as nearly to annihilate the man of graves.

"Speak, or I will strangle thee. Ha! A thought flashes across my brain. She died, you say, in her sleep?"

"In her sleep," replied the sexton, shaking off Luke's hold. "The evening saw her blithe,

healthful, blooming—the morning, stark, stiff, breathless."

"I see," ejaculated Luke, with a frightful gesture. "Was it *so?*"—

"May be."

"No marks of violence?"

"Not that I beheld."

"You saw her, then?"

"I saw her—dead."

"And was it to tell me this you brought me hither? Was it to tell me, I had a mother's murder to avenge, that you brought me to the tomb of her destroyer—when he is beyond the reach of my vengeance?"

Luke exhibited so much frantic violence of manner and gesture, that the sexton entertained some little apprehension that his intellects were unsettled, by the shock of the intelligence. It was, therefore, in what he intended for a soothing tone, that he solicited Luke's attention.

"I will hear nothing more," replied Luke,

and the vaulted chamber rang with his passionate lamentations. Suddenly pausing, he exclaimed, in a loud voice, as if addressing the vacancy, "Am I the sport of this mocking fiend, to whom my agony is derision—my despair a source of enjoyment—beneath whose withering glance my spirit shrinks — who, with half-expressed insinuations, tortures my soul, awakening fancies, that goad me on to dark and desperate deeds? Dead mother! upon thee I call. If in thy grave, thou canst hear the cry of thy most wretched son, yearning to avenge thee—answer me, if thou hast the power. Let me have some token of the truth or falsity of these wild suppositions, that I may wrestle against this demon. But no," added he, in accents of despair; "no ear can hear me, save his to whom my wretchedness is food for hellish glee."

"Could the dead hear thee, she might do so. She is not far off."

"She—who?"

"Thy mother!"

"Devil! I will not tolerate this mockery. Tempt me not."

"I mock thee not. Why should I?"

"Why? I know not. Thou saidst she was not afar off. Can thine aged eyes see into the graves? Is she here in bodily presence?"

"She lies within this space."

Luke staggered back, as if struck by a thunderbolt! He spoke not, but fell with a violent shock against a pile of coffins, at which he caught for support.

"Ay, *there*," cried the sexton, extending a skinny finger, "thou hast hit it."

"What have I done?" exclaimed Luke, recoiling.

"What hast thou done? Ha!—have a care?" A thundering crash resounded through the vault. One of the coffins, which Luke had dislodged from its position, tumbled to the ground; it alighted upon its side, splitting asunder in the fall.

"Great heavens! what is this?" cried Luke;

as a dead body, clothed in all the hideous apparel of the tomb, rolled forth to his feet.

"It is thy mother's corpse," answered the sexton. "I brought thee hither to behold it; but thou hast anticipated my intentions."

"*This* my mother?" shrieked Luke. "Can the dead indeed hear?" he shudderingly added. "This is a solemn token: she was not insensible to my adjuration."

He dropped upon his knees by the body, seizing one of its chilly hands, and bending over the countenance of the dead, as it lay upon the floor, with its face upwards.

The sexton took the candle from the sconce.

"Art thou sure 'tis she?" demanded Luke, as he approached with the light.

"As sure as that thou livest," was the reply.

"Can this be death?" shouted Luke, half frantic: "Impossible! Oh God! She stirs—she moves. The light!—quick—I see her stir! This is dreadful—intolerable."

"Do not deceive yourself," said the sexton, in

a tone which betrayed more emotion than was his wont. "'Tis the bewilderment of fancy: she will never stir again, poor wench." And he shaded the candle with his hand, so as to throw the light full upon the deadly visage. It was motionless as that of an image carved in stone. Pale was that face as monumental marble; beneath the reflex of the yellow flame it wore a waxlike tint, sicklied to a wannish white. No trace of corruption was visible upon the rigid, yet exquisite tracery of its features. No livid hue deformed the delicacy and beauty of its lineaments, but, lovely as it had been in life, unrivalled for its fairness, so was it in death. The sight was indeed a marvel and a mystery; it was as if some pitying spirit had seized the moment

> Before Decay's effacing fingers
> Had swept the lines where beauty lingers,

to arrest the hands of the Spoiler, ere one withering touch had been laid upon her brow—ere a breath of his blighting atmosphere had fallen upon

his victim, and, failing to avert the stroke of fate, had invested the fine clay it could not re-animate, with a perpetuity of living loveliness. A profuse cloud of raven hair escaped from its swathements in the fall, which hung like a dark veil over the bosom and person of the departed, and presented a startling contrast to the prevailing paleness of the skin and the white sere-clothes. Flesh still adhered to the hand, though it mouldered into dust within the gripe of Luke, as he pressed the fingers to his lips. The garments of the dead were disposed like night-gear about her person, and from without their folds a few withered flowers had fallen. A strong, aromatic odour, of a pungent nature, was diffused around; hence it was evident that the art by which the ancient Egyptians endeavoured to rescue their kindred from decomposition, had been resorted to, to preserve the fleeting charms of the unfortunate Susan Bradley; making it evident, also, that he who, living, loved her not, or loving, had destroyed her, yet when dead—

lost to him for ever—had sought, actuated by some inscrutable revulsion of feeling, to save from utter extinction those fatal endowments of person, which had first found favour in his eyes, and ultimately ensured the destruction of the hapless possessor.

A pause of awful silence succeeded, broken only by the panting respiration of Luke. He spoke not—groaned not—moved not; but his breast laboured heavily with suppressed emotion, and there was a quivering in the muscles of his limbs, like that proceeding from severe, paralytic affection. The sexton stood by, apparently an indifferent spectator of the scene of horror. He rendered no assistance—pronounced no word of sympathy—expressed no commiseration, but remained fixed for a few moments in the attitude we have described. His eye wandered from the dead to the living, and gleamed with a peculiar and indefinable expression, half apathy, half abstraction. For one single instant, as he scrutinized the features of

his daughter, his brow, contracted as in anger, immediately afterwards was elevated as in scorn; but otherwise you would have sought in vain to read the purport of that cold, insensible glance, which dwelt for one brief space on the face of the mother, and settled eventually upon her son. Worlds would that son have given to have been at that instant equally insensible. A prey to the keenest anguish—to agony almost insupportable, he yet obtained no relief in tears—no drop of moisture found its way to his eyes. The agony of his emotions can only be conceived by those who have endured (and which of us hath altogether escaped?) the martyrdom of moments like to those—who, like him, have felt the iron enter into their soul, and have drained to the dregs the bowl of bitterness.

Brother! hath it been thine, to look thy last upon the lifeless form of one who has been to thee thy tenderest friend—thy gentlest adviser—thy fondest, truest counsellor—the only partner of thy boyish hopes—the sole sharer of

thy boyish griefs—the confidant of thy maturer years—the one, alone, to whom all thy hidden thoughts were poured forth—in whom thy love, unalloyed by passion, unmixed with jealousy, was centred? Hast thou seen the light of tenderness, that beamed in those dear eyes, dimmed, extinguished? Hast thou known the moment when the silver music that dwelt upon that tongue hath become mute?

Father! hast thou gazed thy last upon thy child—thy young, thy beautiful child—thy daily prayer—thy nightly dream—thy cherished hope—thy fairest flower—thy one, sole star—the breath of thy nostrils—the apple of thine eye?

And thou husband! divorced by death—thy bride hath been torn from thy arms in the full fruition of thy happiness—the cup of content was too full—it hath been dashed to the ground—broken in pieces. She is gone! she is fled! The arm that clung to thee is nerveless—the lips that showered their warm caresses upon thine, can caress thee never again—

the bosom that cherished thee, heaves no longer—the heart that worshipped thee, beats no more.

Son! the last link that bound thee to thy fellows is snapped in twain; all others have discarded thee, have cast thee from them, save her, who now lies in death before thee. Thy mother, through good and ill report, hath been always faithful to thy fortunes—ever soothing, never reproaching thee—calming thy wrath—mitigating thy miseries. Now thou art utterly desolate—thou hast lost every thing—even *her*.

All ye who have similarly suffered, need no description of the extent of Luke's suffering—of the heart-quake that shook him. Of an earnest vivacity of temperament amounting even to the fierce, he at the same time was endued with the tenderest sensibilities. His case was not like one of those we have enumerated. He had known no mother's love—no mother's watchful care—no mother's gushing tenderness; for him had beamed no mother's well-remembered smile; but the absence of this reality had created

in his ardent, enthusiastic mind, possessed from infancy with but one fanciful image, that of his mother—an image—a phantasm, such as haunts a dreamer's brain, of something like the object of his love, such as he dreamed she would have been, had she ever blessed him with her presence; peopling his imagination with a thousand visionary notions, of smiles, and tears, and looks, remembered like the indistinct perceptions of childhood, and dwelt upon as fondly; till what had been but a dream, nay, the memory of a dream, assumed, as life advanced, a substance, and a shape, distinct and positive; so that when, for the first time, he actually beheld the object of his idolatry before him in death, no wonder that all these hoarded emotions of years should burst forth with irresistible vehemence, and the long sealed fountains of the heart be unloosed.

The sexton, as has been before observed, made no effort to console him. For some space he neither spoke, nor altered his position; at length

the withered flowers attracted his attention. He stooped to pick up one of them.

"Faded as the hand that gathered ye, as the bosom on which ye were strewn!" he murmured. "No sweet smell left—but—faugh." Holding in disgust the dry leaves to the flame of the candle, they were instantly ignited, and the momentary brilliance played like a smile upon the features of the dead. The sexton observed the effect. "Such was thy life," he exclaimed; "a brief, bright sparkle, followed by dark, utter, extinction;" and he flung the expiring ashes of the floweret from his hand.

CHAPTER III.

Duch. You are very cold.
I fear you are not well after your travel.
Hah! lights.——Oh horrible!——
Fer. Let her have lights enough.
Duch. What witchcraft doth he practise, that he hath left
A dead hand here.

DUCHESS OF MALFY.

THE sexton's waning candle now warned him of the progress of time; and having completed his arrangements, he addressed himself to Luke, intimating his intention of departing. Having received no answer, and remarking no signs of life about his grandson, he began to be apprehensive that he had fallen into a swoon. Drawing near to Luke, he took him gently by the arm. Thus disturbed, Luke groaned aloud.

"I am glad to find thou canst breathe, if it be only after that melancholy fashion," said the sexton; "but come, I have wasted time enough already; you must indulge your grief elsewhere."

"Leave me," cried Luke.

"Leave you! What, here? It were as much as my office is worth. You can return some other night; but go you must, now—at least, if you take on so. I never calculated upon a scene like this, or it had been long ere I brought you hither. So come away; but first lend me a hand to replace the body in the coffin."

"Touch it not," exclaimed Luke; "she shall not rest another hour within these accursed walls. I will bear her hence myself."

"Thou wilt do no such thing," cried the sexton. "I have the keys, and the custody of this place; and I will suffer no man but the vicar himself to interfere with my prerogatives and rights. Thou art a fool to think of such a thing; is it not to her honour and her credit that she is decently

interred here? And what could'st thou do with the body—sell it to the doctor, Mister Titus Tyrconnel, and get me the credit of aiding and abetting a body-snatcher? No, grandson Luke, bethink thee twice, ere you deprive your mother's remains of Christian burial."

It was well for the sexton that the whole of this speech did not reach Luke's ears, or he might have been tempted to put an unpleasant termination to his taunts. As it was, he replied not; and after another interval of silence, Peter asked, "What wouldst thou do with it?"

"I know not," answered Luke. "I cannot think; but *here* she shall not stay." He sobbed hysterically, and relapsed into his former insensibility.

"At least, place the body decently within the coffin. If thou art bent upon committing a rash act, I will not baulk thy humour; it is not my way to interfere, so if thou comest to harm 'tis of thine own doing. I wash my hands of it. But why do I chatter thus? he heeds me not.

Poh—this is worse than Midsummer madness," continued the sexton; "but the lad is crazed with grief, and all about a mother who has been four-and-twenty years in her grave. I will even put her out of the way myself." Saying which, he proceeded, as noiselessly as possible, to raise the corpse in his arms, depositing it softly within its former tenement. Carefully as he executed his task, he could not accomplish it without occasioning a slight accident to the fragile frame. Insensible as he was, Luke had not relinquished the hold he maintained of his mother's hand. And when Peter lifted the body, the ligaments, connecting the hand with the arm, were suddenly snapped asunder. It would appear afterwards, that this joint had been tampered with, and partially dislocated. But without entering into further particulars in this place, it may be sufficient to observe, that the hand, detached from the socket at the wrist, remained within the gripe of Luke. Ignorant of the mischief he had occasioned, the sexton continued

his labours, unconsciously, until the noise which he of necessity made, in stamping with his heel upon the plank, was the means of recalling Luke to sensibility. The first thing he perceived, upon collecting his faculties, were the skeleton fingers, which he found twined within his own. His frame thrilled as he regarded the severed limb.

"What have you done with her? Why have you left this with me?" said he.

"It was not my intention to have done so," answered the sexton, suspending his occupation. "I have just made fast the lid, but it is easily undone. You had better restore it."

"*Restore* it," echoed Luke, staring at the bony fragment.

"Ay! of what advantage is a dead hand? 'Tis an unlucky keepsake, and will lead to harm. The only use I ever heard for such a thing, was in the case of bow-legged Ben, he who was hanged in irons for murder, on Hardchase Heath, and whose hand was cut off at the

wrist the first night, to make therewith a Hand of Glory, or dead man's candle. Old Mistress Asheton had her throat cut that night, and the candle, held by the glorious fingers, lighted her murderers the while, and subdued the poor woman and her servants into an unawakening sleep—not even a cry was heard. Ho! ho!—But you have no such intentions, I'm sure; if you had, this would never serve your turn, for it must be the limb of a hanged malefactor, and the candle must be of the melted fat; therefore ——"

"Look there," exclaimed Luke, extending the hand towards the sexton. "What seest thou?"

"What I have seldom seen, two hands in one —a dead and a living—a son's and a mother's."

"Seest thou nothing upon that finger?"

"I see something shine. Hold it nigher the light. Ha! that is strange, truly. How came it there?"

"How came it there! Ask of Sir Piers! ask of her *husband!*" shouted Luke, with a wild

burst of exulting laughter. "Ha! ha! ha! 'tis a wedding ring; and look, the finger is bent; it must have been placed thereon in life. There is no deception in this; no trickery—hah!"

"It would seem not; that sinew must have been contracted in life. The tendons are pulled down so tightly, that the ring could not be withdrawn without breaking the finger."

"Thou art right; it is so. This is her hand; it must be so. She was his wedded wife. Ha! ha! ha!"

"It would seem so."

"*Seem!* it is undoubted. Thou art sure that coffin contains her body?"

"Thy mother's? Sure as this carcase is my own."

"The hand—'tis her's. Can any doubt exist?"

"Wherefore should it? That hand was broken from the arm by accident within this moment. I noticed not the occurrence, but it must have been so."

"Yes—yes, of course; and she was wedded, and I am not ——"

"Illegitimate!—For thy own sake, I am glad of it."

"Glad! my heart will burst. Oh! could I but establish the fact of this marriage—her fame, my wrongs, would be indeed avenged."

"Be not too sanguine; thou wilt find it no easy task to establish. Granting it were the fact, and I am inclined to think it might be so, consider whom thou hast to contend with."

"Lady Rookwood! Why, *she* was lady Rookwood before her. She shall know it! She shall know it!"

"Ay, and her son, young Sir Ranulph. Think you he will tamely yield his birthright to you?"

"*His* birthright! *Mine!* if this be so. *Sir* Ranulph—that title belongs to me. I'll strip them of their borrowed honours. I'll ——. Ha! ha!—I shall go mad for joy."

"A word."

"I cannot talk—cannot listen, now."

"You are beside yourself. This can never be."

"Never! Give me but a hope—but an inch of ground to stand upon—a thread to cling to, and thou shalt see how I will maintain my hold."

"I give thee no hopes. I can give thee none. Even hadst thou the right, how canst thou, unfriended, poor, make head against those already in possession, and wealthy to boot?"

"I will brave every difficulty, every danger, to assert my claims."

"Grant you will do so; you must have evidence beyond this ring, whereon to found those claims. It may satisfy you, and other credulous people—as myself, for instance—that such a marriage hath taken place; but it is scarce likely to meet with implicit belief with others, nor what is more, to obtain for thee the broad lands, and the proud name of Rookwood. And after all, 'tis the union you must establish, beyond a doubt, between Sir Piers and your mother; for it is possible, at least there may be those will say

so, that she was a married woman, and yet no wife to Sir Piers."

"They will not repeat the assertion in my hearing. Why say this to me?"

"I do not say so, nor do I think so; all I fear is, that Sir Piers' precautions were so well taken, that you may never be able to adduce proof positive that such a marriage did exist."

"But we may disprove any other alleged alliance, and if Sir Piers did act with so much caution, why left he this speaking evidence behind, to point, like an index, to the secret?"

"It is not easy to account for it; and yet the chances were against the occurrence of an event like the present. Looking more narrowly at the wrist-joint, it would appear as if he had really intended to prevent such a discovery, but had desisted when his work was partially completed, for Sir Piers was ever apt to act one moment, and repent of it the next; and his allowing that ring to remain, most likely proceeded from some passing feeling of remorse; besides, as I said

before, he, probably, did not calculate upon such a contingency as this. He took care nobody should see this vault, without his permission, during his lifetime. I have not had the keys myself before yesterday, these four-and-twenty years, although he has often visited the place during that period."

"Indeed!"

"Ay, I have seen him—watched him, when he thought no human eye beheld him; hither would he often steal at night, and fasten himself within."

"With what intent?"

"You shall hear——Hush—Was not that a footstep?"

"I hear nothing—proceed."

The sexton gave a preparatory cough.

"One night, happening to be within the church porch as he entered, I followed him unobserved. He descended to the vault, leaving the door ajar; I crept softly down the steps,

and there I saw him standing, even where now thou standest, beside an open coffin."

"That ——"

"Ay, that! He then unscrewed the lid. He was gazing on the dead within! his back was towards me—I could not see his face, but I heard his groans, his convulsive sobs, his heart-rending cries. If I ever pitied human being, I could have pitied Sir Piers."

"And yet thou doubtest his having a weight of secret sin upon his soul; thou thinkest his hands were not embrued in blood?"

"Said I so? I never doubted it. You asked me if I had seen the deed done; I saw her upon her death-bed; there were no indications of a violent end upon her person, further than exist upon it now, as thou hast seen her; no bruise—no blow—no wound; and yet I *doubt* not that she came to that end untimely. *Doubt* I she was his wife?—No, I doubt it not; and yet I saw no ceremony take place—

heard no priest's blessing pronounced upon them —saw no ring placed upon her finger—nor dreamed of such a thing until now. Howbeit there is one living can make doubts certainties. But to return to Sir Piers. There he stood, making lamentation, moaning, and beating his breast like one distracted, tearing his hair, and invoking destruction upon himself; until, at length, the violence of the fit worked its own cure, and he became calmer. He then bent himself over her body, and kissed its cold lips as reverently and tenderly as if she had been his bride asleep beside him."

"And this you witnessed?"

"I did; his next proceeding was, to pray by her side long and fervently; and seeing him arise, as if with the intention of departing, I was about to retreat from my hiding-place, when my attention was arrested by his voice. At first I thought he had perceived me, and glad was I when I found myself mistaken, for I make no doubt, had he discovered me spying upon his privacy,

but that he would, in his wrath, have dispatched me outright. He was talking to himself:—I ventured once more to look round—his face was then towards the door, and as I looked through the chink at the opening, I could see the fierce glances of his eyes. Thine burn with a like fire at this moment—that alone would prove thou art thy father's son, and a true Rookwood. Well, his glances flew like flashes of lightning round the vault; and he stood with one foot upon that old marble monument, and his arms spread out, as if about to strike the senseless statue, and I could hear that he was cursing the warrior within the tomb. His words still ring in my ears, and I could almost fancy I heard the frenzied, fearful tone in which he pronounced them. Thou shalt hear it, for each word dwells upon my memory. 'First of an accursed race!' he cried, 'thou parent source from whence that stream of hot and tainted blood, which hath raged like lava within the veins of thy sons for generation after generation succeeding thee, had its rise!—what

hindereth me from pouring out upon thy tomb a rich libation of that blood, as an offering to thy manes, and to the infernal gods, to whom thou hast sold thyself, and haply all thy race? Nothing should hinder me, did I deem that it would act as an expiation of my offences, as an atonement of my guilt. But would it cleanse and purify my soul?—Would it not deepen my guilt—darken my doom—would it not plunge me beyond redemption to instant perdition? I feel that such an act would do so. Yet would I ask of thee, wherefore is it—that this heritage of crime hath descended from son to son, through all thy line—each struggling against inevitable fate—each filled with remorse!—none escaping?—Wherefore is it, that, through thine agency, we are doomed to have our names blotted for ever from the fair page of heaven—to be inscribed upon the blackest scroll of hell? Better had it been for them—for me—that thou hadst never lived, or that thy race had expired with thee. But as this cannot be, take back the ten-fold

curse wherewith thou hast visited us: may it recoil, with all its accumulated horrors and agonies, upon thy own devoted head.'—And he trampled and spat upon the tomb."

"I forgive him," said Luke, "Heaven have mercy upon his soul."

"Amen!" responded the sexton. "His deadliest foe would not have refused him mercy at that hour. I heard no more. Apprehensive of discovery, I hastened to conceal myself; and well was it that I did so, for scarce a moment had elapsed, ere I heard Sir Piers' departing footsteps pacing along the aisle.

"'Tis a dreadful tale," said Luke, "but tell me, I beseech of you, how came she buried here?"

"It was Sir Piers' wish—she was secretly brought hither—I could tell thee such a tale about that—but another time—the candle is dying in its socket—we shall be in darkness."

"What matters it? art thou afraid? or canst thou not find thy way from hence without a light?"

"Afraid!—Ha, ha!—What is there that I fear? these gentry?—Not I, in light or darkness; and as to the door, I have little apprehension of missing that. Besides, it is now bright moonlight within the church: and therefore, if thou wilt, thou shalt have the story—and here too. Now we are, indeed, in complete darkness; that flash was the last. Let us seat ourselves; place thyself near me, that I may know that thou listenest."

"Fear not that," replied Luke.

CHAPTER IV.

Fer. Let me see her face again;—
Why did'st not thou pity her? What an excellent
Honest man might'st thou have been,
If thou had'st borne her to some sanctuary!
Or, bold in a good cause, opposed thyself
Between her innocence and my revenge.
I hate thee for it——

WEBSTER.

GROPING his way to his former seat, and coming fortunately in contact with the bottle, the sexton applied his lips to its mouth. Luke followed, having first carefully placed the skeleton hand within the folds of his waistcoat.

"Art thou seated?" inquired the sexton.

"I am here, beside thee," was the reply.

"You have seen your mother," began the sexton, "and I need not waste words in describing her. If she is beautiful, as you beheld her in death, you may conclude she did not lack attractions when alive. In truth, she was, at that time, reckoned the prettiest girl in the village, and would have been the prettiest in any village. I, her father, say this, and the more freely, that beauty has no weight with me, but rather the reverse. I never loved her as I should have done, and for that very cause. She was her mother's child, and when her mother died, she left me to live with her aunt. I did not grieve to part with her: she was more than indifferent to me—she was insulting—I gave her a parting word of advice—Do you hear me?"

"I hear thee," answered a hollow voice, the tones of which startled the sexton, as they sounded differently from those of Luke.

"I told Susan," continued he, recovering from his momentary surprise, and satisfied of his

companion's attention, "that her beauty would be her bane—that 'twas a fatal gift, and would prove her undoing. It hath proved so since; but she turned a deaf ear to me then. We saw little of each other, but I heard of her sometimes, and heard also of the admiration she excited amongst the hinds of Rookwood, and of the life she was leading her admirers; for Susan had a tricksy, coquettish way with her, that gained her many followers. However, I never heard a whisper against her fame, not a breath, till she went to live at the hall, as the squire's mistress; and then nobody spoke of her, at least, not to me. However, I was secretly pleased with the rumour, and determined to satisfy myself, and have my fling at her. She had been there then full six months. I went to the hall, and asked to speak with her; she refused to see me, but I would not be denied. I dodged the menial, who brought her message, to the room. I saw, in a moment, how it was with her—I saw why she refused me—I saw that my boding words had

come true; she was pregnant—I had my revenge. I spared not my reproaches: she entreated me to be silent—implored my blessing. My answer was a word coupled with a curse; I turned upon my heel, and left the room."

"Go on," said Luke, grinding his teeth.

"I saw her not again in life. Some months afterwards she gave thee birth; and it might be within the year, that I heard of her demise: she had expired, they said, suddenly. It was then that Sir Roger sought me out. He was in great trouble—he was frantic—he told me an unconnected story about her decease, and hurried me to the hall. I saw her upon her death-bed, but I felt no compassion for her; she was beautiful as ever, and seemed to smile. I sickened at the sight, and felt my hatred revive."

"Monster!" muttered Luke.

"I killed her not—I could not have harmed a hair of her head—but I did not regret her. My revenge had been executed by another. My words had come true; her bloom had been

blighted—yea, even at its freshest. I shed no tear for her—vented no sigh in sorrow—for, in truth, I pitied her not."

"I could strangle him," mentally exclaimed Luke, "though he is my own blood!"

"Where is the bottle?" cried the sexton, searching for it; "thou art cold as ice, Luke; we had better leave this."

"My pulse throbs with fever," replied Luke; "thou hast not touched me. But go on; I will hear it out, now."

"Not touched thee! what was it I felt, or imagined I felt? but no matter. Ah! whence breathes that chill upon my face? I would we had a light—where is Mole?" And he called to his dog; but Mole had slunk away, and answered not to the call.

"This is strange," said the sexton.

"Proceed," cried Luke; "if thou wouldst not have me deem thee dastard, as well as dotard."

"Well," continued Peter, fortifying his nerves with a draught, "to return.—'What

would you have me do?' said I to Sir Piers, as we stood together by the bed-side; for I was anxious to know for what motive he had brought me thither. I thought it was not, surely, to indulge me with a sight of my daughter, as he was not ignorant of our sentiments towards each other, but it seemed I was mistaken, for he replied, 'I have suffered none to approach her beside thyself, and my housekeeper, Agnes—thou knowest her—nor will I do so.'—'Indeed!' said I, surprised, 'but will you have no crowner's quest upon the body?'—'Crowner's quest!' cried he, in amazement. 'No; she died in her sleep, wherefore should it be so? No, no—I will suffer no eyes to look upon her but those she loved. She was ever so modest, that I will have no rude gaze profane her countenance, now that she cannot avert it. I tell thee what, good, excellent Peter' (for he had at length discovered my will), 'do my bidding in this, and thou shalt have gold—glittering gold—in heaps; ay, in heaps, if thou wilt do it. I would have her interred—privately

interred—this night, within our family vault; the coffin will be brought hither; thou and I will carry it to the place of burial.'—'I only see two objections to this,' I answered. 'Name them,' said Sir Piers. 'The one is, that a hasty funeral, like this, may tend to scandal, and may bring you into trouble; the other, and the lesser, that I have heard that none but those of the house of Rookwood, their wives and daughters, are ever buried within that vault; it hath ever been the rule.'—'For thy first objection,' replied Sir Piers, 'if there be scandal, it will attach to me—I will bear its brunt; for the second, it is my pleasure to break the rule in favour of thy daughter, who hath ever been dear to me as a wife—and who is there shall say me nay? I am resolved.'—'If so be you are resolved, Sir Piers,' I rejoined, 'I have nothing to further say, and am ready to do your bidding. But reflect!'—'Reflect!' said he. 'I have reflected. Oh! but to part with her!' And he burst into a torrent of tears. 'To lose her for ever—never more to see

that beauteous body—to nail it down within a hideous chest—to deliver it to the rioting worm —the thought is insupportable! Oh! that I could save it, at least from that.'—'Such things have been done,' answered I; for I preserved my composure, and was not, like him, carried away by my grief. 'They have,' answered he; 'but it is too late to think of it now: where should I find one who could embalm her dear body?' and he burst into a fresh torrent of tears. 'I once knew of such a one,' I replied; 'a gipsy woman, who professeth that art, and is accounted an adept amongst her tribe. I have indeed spoken with her myself upon the subject, being one connected with my calling.'

"Tell me her name," eagerly demanded Luke.

"Barbara Lovel."

"Great God! is it possible? Barbara Lovel!"

"The same."

"Thou hast perhaps met with her in thy wanderings with that wild race. She must be

old and wrinkled now, if she hath not gone the way of all flesh long ago."

"She is yet alive; I saw her but yesterday," replied Luke.

"Alive! Barbara Lovel, yet alive—I did not think it."

"And you found her? She did your bidding?"

"She did. Sir Piers implored me to seek her out. I found her without difficulty, told her my object, and she readily consented to accompany me to the hall. Sir Piers was impatient for my return. He bound us by a terrible oath not to divulge, during his lifetime, what was about to take place. I hesitated not to take it; for, to speak truth, and whatever misgivings I might have as to Susan's end, I had no desire to betray thee. Barbara likewise agreed. She listened to his promises—she accepted his offers."

There was a moaning sound at that moment heard within the vault, and the dog whined in the corner, whither he had crept. The sexton in

his own mind attributed the noise to the cold current of air he had before perceived upon his cheek, and which now breathed upon him again. He noticed the interruption only with a slight involuntary shudder, and proceeded:—

"Barbara Lovel had brought with her a box of spices, and gums, and fragrant herbs, besides some curiously-fashioned instruments, of which I caught a glimpse, of odd shape and manufacture. She asked for a chafing dish, and charcoal; she made her preparations, had linen fetched for her, and basons, and I know not what. She then insisted upon being left alone. Sir Piers would fain have remained in the room, but she would not hear of it, and locked the door. Silently she went to work; and, as we kept watch without, we perceived a rich steam issue from out the crevices of the door. Sir Piers thought some accident had happened, and was about to force an entrance, when he was checked, in his intent, by the loud voice of Barbara, angrily commanding him to desist, upon pain of her instant

departure, and the leaving her work unfinished. So he made no further attempt, and at nightfall Barbara came forth, looking as white as a shroud. She took the key from out the door, delivered it to Sir Piers, and asked to have an interview with him alone. Their conference was long; and Barbara departed, I have reason to think not dissatisfied with Sir Piers' bounty—but this I only conjecture, never having met or spoken with her since that night. Presently the coffin was brought—we were admitted to the room. The windows were thrown wide open—the steam had evaporated—Susan was as thou hast seen her. She was laid out, placed within the shell; and before all was made fast, Sir Piers, with a trembling hand, cut off one long lock from her black hair, which he said he would keep to his dying day; and I make no doubt he kept his word. That night, a dreary and a dark one 'twas, we bore our burthen hither."

Something like a groan followed the conclusion of the sexton's discourse. It was evident

that it proceeded not from Luke, as an exclamation burst from him at the same instant. Luke stretched out his arm, an unsubstantial something seemed to press against him, communicating a chill like death to his frame.

"Who is between us?" he ejaculated.

"Between us!" cried the sexton, leaping from the coffin lid with an agility that did him honour. "Is aught between us?"

"I will fire off my gun. The flash will light us."

"Do so," hastily rejoined the sexton; "but not in this direction."

"Get behind me," cried Luke, and he pulled the trigger.

A blaze of vivid light illumined the darkness. Still nothing was visible, save the warrior figure, that showed suddenly, and then vanished like a ghost. The buck-shot rattled against the farther end of the vault.

"Let us hence," cried the sexton, who had rushed to the door, and thrown it wide open. "Mole! Mole!" The dog sprang after him.

"I could have sworn that I felt something," said Luke; "whence issued that groan?"

"Ask not whence," replied Peter, "Reach me my mattock, and spade, and the lantern; they are behind thee. And stay, it were better to bring away the bottle."

"Take them, and leave me here."

"Here, in the vault?—I could tell you a story of that statue, that——"

"Not now."

"You will rue it—there is danger—the arch fiend himself is not——"

"Leave me, I say; or await, if thou wilt, my coming, in the church. If there is aught that may be revealed to my ear alone, I will not quail from it, though the dead themselves should arise to proclaim the mystery. It may be—but—go—there are thy tools;" and he shut the door, with a jar that shook the sexton's frame.

Peter, after some muttered murmurings at the hardihood and madness, as he termed it, of his headstrong grandson, disposed his lengthy limbs to

repose, upon a cushioned seat without the communion railing. As the pale moonlight fell upon his gaunt, cadaverous, and demoniacal face, he looked like some unholy thing, suddenly annihilated by the presiding influence of that sacred spot. Mole crouched himself in a ring at his master's feet. Peter had not dozed many minutes, when he was aroused by Luke's return. The latter was very pale, and the perspiration stood in big drops upon his brow.

"Hast thou made fast the door?" was his first interrogation.

"Here is the key."

"What hast thou seen?" he next inquired, remarking the deathly paleness of his face.

Luke made no answer. At that moment the church clock struck two, breaking the stillness of the place with an iron clang. Luke raised his eyes. A ray of moonlight, streaming obliquely through the painted window, fell upon the gilt lettering of a black mural entablature. The

lower part, the inscription, was in shade, but the emblazonment, and

"Reginaldus de Rookwood, Eques Auratus,"

were clear and distinct. Luke trembled, he knew not why, as the sexton pointed to it.

"Thou hast heard of the hand-writing upon the wall," said the scoffer; "Look there—'His kingdom hath been taken from him.'—Ha, ha!"

"Let us quit this place, and get into the fresh air; I am faint," said Luke, striding past his companion, and traversing the church-floor with hasty steps. Peter was not slow to follow. The key was applied, and they emerged into the churchyard. The grassy mounds were bathed in the moon-beams, and the two yew trees, throwing their black, jagged shadows over the grave hills, looked like evil spirits, brooding over the sanctified repose of the righteous.

The sexton noticed the deathly paleness of Luke's countenance; but it might be the tinge of the sallow moonlight.

"I will be with thee at thy cottage, ere day-break," said the latter; and, turning an angle of the church, he disappeared from view.

"He is crazed, beyond all question," said Peter, shouldering his spade, and whistling to Mole; "though it must be confessed, his brain must have been a strong one, to have withstood the trial of this night. Mischief, I foresee, will come of it; but I don't trouble my head with these matters further. A dram and a song will put Care to flight." Draining the bottle to the last drop, he flung it from him, and commenced chaunting, in a high key and cracked voice, a wild ditty, the words of which ran as follow:—

THE SEXTON'S SONG.

The Carrion Crow is a Sexton bold,
He raketh the dead from out the mould;
He delveth the ground like a miser old,
Stealthily hiding his store of gold.
Caw! Caw!

The Carrion Crow hath a coat of black,
Silky and sleek, like a priest's, to his back;
Like a lawyer he grubbeth—no matter what way—
The fouler the offal, the richer his prey.
Caw! Caw! the Carrion Crow!
Dig! Dig! in the ground below!

The Carrion Crow hath a dainty maw,
With savory pickings he crammeth his craw;
Kept meat from the gibbet it pleaseth his whim,
It never can *hang* too long for him.
Caw! Caw!

The Carrion Crow smelleth powder, 'tis said,
Like a soldier escheweth the taste of cold lead;
No jester or mime hath more marvellous wit,
For wherever he lighteth he maketh a hit.
Caw! Caw! the Carrion Crow!
Dig! Dig! in the ground below!

The cottage which Peter inhabited adjoined the churchyard, so that he had scarcely concluded his song when he reached the door; and as soon as he had disposed of his tools, he betook himself to slumber.

CHAPTER V.

Brian. Ralph! hearest thou any stirring?

Ralph. I heard one speak here, hard by, in the hollow. Peace! Master, speak low. Nouns! if I do not hear a bow go off, and the buck bray, I never heard deer in my life.

Bri. Stand, or I'll shoot.

Sir Arthur. Who's there?

Bri. I am the keeper, and do charge you stand.
You have stolen my deer.

MERRY DEVIL OF EDMONTON.

LUKE's first impulse had been to free himself from the restraint the sexton's society imposed. He longed to commune with himself. Leaping the small boundary-wall that defended the churchyard from a deep, green lane, he hurried along in a direction contrary to that taken by the sexton, making the best of his way until he

arrived at a gap in the high-banked hazel hedge, which overhung the road. Heedless of the impediments thrown in his way by the undergrowth of a rough, ring fence, he struck through the opening that presented itself, and, climbing over the moss-grown paling, trod presently upon the elastic sward of Rookwood Park.

A few minutes rapid walking brought him to the summit of a rising ground crowned with aged oaks, and as he paused beneath their broad shadows, his troubled spirit, soothed by the quietude of the scene, in part resumed its serenity.

Luke yielded to the gentle influence of the time and hour. The stillness of the spot sobered the irritation of his frame, and the dewy chilliness cooled the fever of his brow. Leaning for support against the gnarled trunk of one of the trees, he gave himself up to contemplation. The events of the last hour—of his whole existence—passed in rapid review before his mental vision. The thought of the

wayward, vagabond life he had led—of the wild adventures of his youth—of all he had been—of all he had *done*—of all he had endured—crowded his mind; and then, like the passing of a cloud flitting across the autumnal moon, and occasionally obscuring the smiling landscape before him, his soul was shadowed by the remembrance of the awful revelations of the last hour, and the fearful knowledge he had acquired of his mother's fate—of his father's guilt. Shudderingly he called to mind the horrors he had witnessed, but the occultation was of brief endurance; the cloud passed away, the moon was full again in all her ancient lustre—the future—the bright glorious future, was before him, and he eagerly longed for the coming struggle, the result of which, his sanguine anticipations pictured as guerdoned with success.

"Then why should I perplex myself with fears?" he cried; "why admit a doubt? the hand of Fate directs me, beckons me to the goal. It will be so; of that I am assured. No more

of doubt! Now that I am away from that horrible place, the tightness that restrained my chest is gone. I can breathe again. I have thrown off the sickening torpor that deadened my faculties. How calm, how soothing, how tranquil, is this lovely scene! The face of nature —nature—whose loveliness has ever found a mirror in my bosom, smiles upon me—welcomes me. I hail this welcome as a harbinger of returning peace.

"And this lordly park! these proud domains! these towering trees! yon ancestral mansion! all that my eye can reach, shall call me lord; and I shall be rich—powerful—happy. *Shall* I be happy? Wherefore not? I will not shackle myself with the bonds and fetters the enslaved worldling imposeth upon himself. I will not bow down to the habits and fashions acknowledged by fools, who sacrifice their own free will to the whims and caprices of what is called society. I despise them. I will conform to no mode of life but that which liketh me. My freedom of

purpose shall be subject to no such trammels and restraints. Such as I have been, such I will continue to be, with none to say me nay. I cannot change my nature. I will not attempt it. My wild pastimes, my dangerous enterprises, I must and will forego—and my companions—ha! How would they grace the board of the Lord of Rookwood, should I be lord of that house? How would their names sound in my halls? Shall I replace them with new faces? Shall I cast them off?—I have no alternative.

"Wealth, they say, seareth the heart of the possessor; lands enlarge not the freedom of their lord. Even I, a wanderer, homeless, houseless, friendless, feel as much liberty and license to roam over this fair park as they could, who deem themselves its owners. It is not, then, the imaginary right to certain portions of this earth that can confer, along with the freehold of the soil, a freedom entire and uncontrouled, such as I have ever courted, ever obtained; and

to lose which were to lose life itself, and all that sweetens life. 'Tis not mere possession that can confer this, if the *spirit* be wanting; but with *me*, used as I shall use it, increase of power, acquisition of wealth, of lands and liberties, will but be an extension and enlargement of independence, and, as such, of enjoyment and happiness.

"But, were it otherwise, there is one gratification in store that will not fail me—Revenge! That thought alone would goad me on to prosecute my purpose—nothing fearing—nothing shunning—braving every thing. As he who swims against a headlong stream, keeps his eye fixed on one certain point, and makes for that, though wave, and tide, and current be adverse, even so will I—the mark is fixed, reach it I will, or perish in the effort.

"Yes, they who have persecuted me—who have contemned my mother's memory—who have deemed me insignificant—who have scorned me,

as incapable of retaliation—who have hunted me down—shall find that, like the hart at bay, I can turn, and gore.—Ay, *gore !*"—

Panting with choler, like the proud creature to whom he had likened himself, Luke threw a fierce and angry glance around, as if in search of some object whereupon to expend his rising wrath; and if he encountered nothing, he found at least that which had the effect of subduing his excitement. Exquisite as the work of enchantment, lay the beautiful scene before him, and his heart melted beneath the witchery of its spell, as he drank its loveliness into his soul.

The eminence whereon he stood was one of the highest points of the park, and commanded a view of the hall, which might be a quarter of a mile distant, discernible through a broken vista of trees, its whitened walls shimmering in the moon-light, and its tall chimneys spiring far from out the round masses of wood wherein it lay embosomed. The ground gradually sloped in that direction, occasionally rising into swells, studded

with magnifient timber—dipping into smooth dells, or stretching out into level glades, until it suddenly sunk into a deep declivity, that formed an effectual division, without the intervention of a ha-ha, or other barrier, between the Chase and the Home Park. A slender stream strayed through this ravine, having found its way thither from a small reservoir, hidden in the higher plantations to the left; and further on, in the open ground, in a line with the hall, though, of course, much below the level of the building, assisted by many local springs, and restrained by a variety of natural and artificial embankments, this brook spread out into an expansive sheet of water. Crossed by a rustic bridge, the sole mean of communication between the parks, the pool found its outlet into the meads below; and even at that distance, and in that still hour, you might almost catch the sound of the rushing waters, as they dashed down the elevation in a foaming cascade; while far away, in the spreading valley, the serpentine mean-

derings of the slender current might be traced, glittering like silvery threads in the lambent moonshine. The mild beams of the queen of night, then in her meridian, trembled upon the topmost branches of the tall timber, quivering, like diamond spray upon the outer foliage, and penetrating through the interstices of the trees, fell upon the light wreathes of vapour then beginning to arise from the surface of the pool, steeping them in misty splendour, and lending to this part of the picture a character of dreamy and unearthly beauty.

All else was in unison—no sound interrupted the silence of Luke's solitude, except the hooting of a large gray owl, that, scared at his approach, or in search of prey, winged its spectral flight in continuous and mazy circles round his head, uttering at each wheel its startling whoop; or a deep, distant bay, that ever and anon boomed upon the ear, proceeding from a pack of hounds kennelled in a shed adjoining the pool before mentioned, but

which was shrouded from view by the rising mist. No living objects presented themselves, save a herd of deer, that crouched in a covert of brown fern beneath the umbrage of a few stunted trees immediately below the point of land whereon Luke stood; and although their branching antlers could scarcely be detected from the shadowy ramifications of the wood itself, they escaped not his practised ken.

"How often," murmured Luke, "in years gone by, have I traversed these moonlit glades, and wandered amidst these woodlands, on nights heavenly as this—ay, and to some purpose, as yon thinned herd might testify! Every dingle, every dell, every rising brow, every bosky vale and shelving covert, have been as familiar to my track as to that of the fleetest and freest of their number: scarce a tree amidst the thickest of yon out-stretching forest, with which I cannot claim acquaintance: 'tis long since I have seen them.—By heavens! 'tis beautiful! —and it is all my own—my own!

"Can I forget that it was here I first emancipated myself from thraldom? Can I forget the boundless feeling of delight that danced within my veins when I first threw off the yoke of servitude, and roved unshackled, unrestrained, amidst these woods?—The wild intoxicating bliss still tingles to my heart. And they are all my own—my own! Softly, what have we there?"

Luke's attention was arrested by an object which could not fail to interest him, sportsman as he was: a snorting bray was heard, and a lordly stag stalked slowly and majestically from out the copse. Luke watched the actions of the noble animal with great interest, drawing back into the shade; a hundred yards or thereabouts might be between him and the buck—it was within range of ball—Luke mechanically grasped his gun; yet his hand had scarcely raised the piece half way to his shoulder, when he dropped it again to its rest.

"What am I about to do?" he exclaimed,

"Why, for mere pastime, should I take away yon noble creature's life, when his carcase would be utterly useless to me? Yet such is the force of habit, that I can scarce resist the impulse that tempted me to fire; and I have known the time, and that not long since, when I should scarce have shown so much self-controul."

Unconscious of the danger it had escaped, the animal moved forward with the same stately step; suddenly it stopped, with ears pricked, as if some sound had smote them. At that instant the click of a gun-lock was heard, at a little distance to the right of Luke—it had missed fire; an instantaneous report from another gun succeeded—and, with a bound high in air, the buck fell upon his back, struggling in the agonies of death. Luke had at once divined the cause; he was aware that poachers were at hand. He fancied that he knew the parties; nor was he deceived in his conjecture. Two figures issued instantly from a covert on the right, and, making to the spot, the first who

reached it, put an end to the animal's struggles by plunging a knife into its throat. The affrighted herd took to their heels, and were seen darting swiftly down the Chase. Luke, meantime, had recognised the voices of the men, and considered within himself whether he should make known his vicinity to them or not. He felt half inclined to resent the deed of slaughter he had witnessed, as an insult to himself, and to treat his companions, for such they were, as aggressors of his own imaginary rights. At first, he resolved to rush upon them, and compel a relinquishment of their prey: but a moment's reflection convinced him of the futility, as well as risk of such a proceeding, and, resolving to abide their departure where he was, he kept a watchful eye upon their movements.

Compressing one knee forcibly on the still throbbing heart of his victim, with the reeking knife between his teeth, one of the twain was occupied in feeling for the deer's fat, when

he was approached by the other, who pointed in the direction of the house. The former raised himself from his kneeling posture, and both appeared to listen attentively. Luke fancied he heard a slight sound in the distance; whatever the noise proceeded from, it was evident the deer stealers were alarmed—they laid hold of the buck, and, dragging it along, concealed the carcase amongst the tall fern; they then retreated, halting for an instant to deliberate, within a few yards of Luke, who was concealed from their view by the trunk of the tree, behind which he had ensconced his person. They were so near, that he lost not a word of their muttered conference.

"The game's spoiled, this time, Dick, any how," growled one, in an angry tone; "the hawks are upon us, and we must mizzle, and leave the fallen bird to take care of itself. Devil damn him; who'd a'thought of Hugh Badger's putting his queer gamms in motion to-night? Curse him, though the tattler be up, and blinking like

a glim, I did think he'd have kept quiet house to-night, if only for decency's sake; but there's no thought of the old squire's finny* running in his addled head."

"I see 'em," returned the other, "thanks to old Oliver—there they are—two—three—and a muzzled bouser†, too. There's Hugh at the head of 'em—shall we stand, and show fight?—I have half a mind for it."

"No, no;" replied the first speaker, "that will never do, Dick—why run the risk of being grab'd for a bit of venison? Had Luke Bradley been with us, indeed, it might have been another guess business; but he's with that old resurrection cove, his grand-dad, in the church—I saw 'em going there myself. Besides we've that to do at the hall, that may make men of us for the rest of our nat'ral lives. It won't do to be snabbled in the nick of it—so let's lope off, and make for the prad, in the lane—keep in the munge‡ as much as you can." And away they scampered down the hill-side.

* Funeral. † Dog. ‡ Darkness.

"Shall I follow," thought Luke, "and run the risk of falling into the keeper's hand, just at this crisis, too? No—but if I am found here, I shall be taken for one of the gang. Something must be done—ha! devil take them, here they are, already."

Further time was not allowed him for re-reflection—a hoarse baying was heard, followed by a loud cry from the keepers. The dog had scented out the game; and, as secrecy was no longer necessary, his muzzle had been removed. To rush forth now were certain betrayal; to remain was almost equally certain detection; and, doubting whether he should obtain credence from the keepers, if he delivered himself over in that garb, and armed, he at once rejected the idea. Just then it flashed across his recollection that his gun had remained unloaded, and he applied himself eagerly to repair this negligence, when he heard the dog in full cry, making swiftly in his direction. He threw himself upon the ground, where the fern was thickest; but this seemed insufficient to baffle

the sagacity of the hound—he had got his scent, and was baying close at hand. The keepers were drawing nigh—Luke gave himself up for lost. The dog, however, stopped where the two poachers had halted, and was there completely at fault: snuffing the ground, he bayed, wheeled round, and then set off, with renewed barking, upon their track. Hugh Badger and his comrades loitered an instant at the same place, looked warily round, and then, as Luke conjectured, followed in the hound's track.

Swift as thought, Luke leapt on his feet, and without even pausing to ascertain which route the keepers had taken, started at full speed, shaping his course in a cross line for the lane, and keeping as much as possible under cover of the trees. Rapid as was his flight, it was not without a witness: one of the keeper's assistants, who had lagged behind, gave the view holloa in a loud voice. Luke pressed forward with redoubled energy, endeavouring to gain the shelter

of the plantation, and this he could readily have accomplished, had no impediment been in his way; but his rage and vexation were boundless, when he heard the keeper's cry echoed by shouts immediately below him, and the tongue of the hound resounding in the hollow. He turned sharp round, steering a middle course, and still aiming at the fence. It was evident, from the cheers of his pursuers, that he was in full view, and he heard them encouraging and directing the hound.

Luke had gained the park palings, along which he rushed, in the vain quest of some practicable point of egress, for the fence was higher in this part of the park than in the other parts, owing to the inequality of the ground. He had cast away his gun as useless; but even without that incumbrance, he dared not hazard the delay of climbing the palings. At this juncture a deep breathing was heard close behind him—he threw a glance over his shoulder—within a few yards was a ferocious blood-

hound, with whose savage nature Luke was well acquainted; the breed, some of which he had already seen, having been maintained at the hall ever since the days of Sir Ranulph. The eyes of the hound were glaring, blood-red—his tongue hanging out, and a row of keen white fangs displayed, like the teeth of a shark. There was a growl—a leap—and the hound was close upon him.

Luke's courage was undoubted; but his heart failed him as he heard the bark of the remorseless brute, and felt that he could not avoid an encounter with it. His resolution was instantly taken: he stopped short, with such suddenness, that the dog, then in the act of springing, flew past him with great violence, and the time, momentary as it was, occupied by the animal in recovering itself, enabled Luke to drop on his knee, and to place one arm, like a buckler, before his face, while he held the other in readiness to grapple his adversary. Uttering a fierce yell, the hound returned to the charge,

darting at Luke, who received the assault without flinching; and in spite of a severe laceration of the arm, he seized the animal by the throat, and hurling it upon the ground, jumped with all his force upon its stomach. A yell of agony, and the contest was ended, and Luke at liberty to pursue his flight unmolested.

Brief as had been the interval required for this combat, it had been sufficient to bring the pursuers within sight of their victim. Hugh Badger, who from the uplands had witnessed the fate of his favourite, with a loud oath discharged the contents of his gun at the head of its destroyer. Fortunate was it for Luke, that at that instant he stumbled over the root of a tree—the shot rattled in the leaves as he fell, and the keeper, concluding that he had at least winged his game, descended more leisurely towards him. As he lay upon the ground, Luke felt that he was wounded; whether by the bite of the dog, from a stray shot, or from bruises inflicted by the fall, he

could not determine; but, smarting with pain, he resolved to wreak his vengeance upon the first person who approached him. He vowed not to be taken with life—to strangle any who should lay hands upon him. At that moment he felt a pressure at his breast—it was the dead hand of his mother.

Luke shuddered. His wrath was curbed—the fire of revenge quenched. He mentally cancelled his rash oath; yet he could not bring himself to surrender at discretion, and without further effort. The keeper and his assistants were approaching the spot where he lay, and searching for his body—Hugh Badger was foremost, and within a yard of him. "D—n his blood," cried Hugh, "the rascal's not half killed, he seems to breathe." The words were scarcely out of his mouth ere the speaker was dashed backwards, and lay sprawling upon the sod. Suddenly and unexpectedly, as an Indian chief might rush upon his foes, arose Luke, propelling himself with tremendous impetus

against Hugh, who happened to stand in his way, and before the startled assistants, who were either too much taken by surprise, or unwilling to draw a trigger, could in any way lay hands upon him. Exerting all the remarkable activity which he possessed, he caught hold of a projecting branch of a tree, and swung himself, at a single bound, fairly over the paling.

Stout Hugh Badger was shortly on his legs, swearing lustily at his defeat. Directing his men to skirt alongside the fence, and make for a particular part of the plantation which he named, and snatching a loaded fowling-piece from one of them, he clambered over the pales, and guided by the crashing branches, and other sounds conveyed to his quick ear, he was speedily upon Luke's track.

The plantation through which the chase was now carried, was not, as might be supposed, a continuation of the ring fence which Luke had originally crossed, on his entrance into the park, though girded by the same line of paling, but,

in reality, a close pheasant preserve, occupying the banks of a ravine, which, after a deep and tortuous course, terminated in the declivity heretofore described as forming the park boundary. Luke plunged into the heart of this defile, fighting his way downwards, in the direction of the brook. His progress was impeded by a thick undergrowth of briar, and other matted vegetation, as well as by the entanglements thrown in his way by the taller bushes of thorn, and hazel, the entwined and elastic branches of which, in their recoil, galled and fretted him, by inflicting frequent, smart blows on his face and hands. This was a hardship he usually little regarded; but, upon the present occasion, it had the effect, by irritating his temper, of increasing the thirst of vengeance raging in his bosom.

Through the depths of the ravine welled the shallow stream before alluded to, and Hugh Badger had no sooner reached its sedgy margin than he lost all trace of the fugitive. He looked cautiously round, listened intently,

and inclined his ear to catch the faintest echo; but all was still, not a branch shook, not a leaf rustled. Hugh was aghast. He had made sure of getting a glimpse, and, perhaps, a stray shot, at the poaching rascal, as he termed him, in the open space, which he was sure the fellow was aiming to reach; and now, all at once, he had disappeared, like a will-o'-the-wisp or a boggart of the clough. However, he could not be far off, and he endeavoured to obtain some clue to guide him in his quest. He was not long in detecting recent marks deeply indented in the mud on the opposite bank. Hugh leapt thither incontinently. Farther on, some rushes were trodden down, and there were other indications of the course the fugitive had taken.

"Hark forward!" shouted Hugh, in the joy of his heart, at this discovery; and, like a well-trained dog, he followed up, with prompt alacrity, the scent he had opened. The brook presented still fewer impediments to expedition than the thick copse, and the keeper pursued the gyra-

tions of the petty current, occasionally splashing into the stream. Here and there was an appearance on the sod that satisfied him he was in the right way. At length he became aware, from the crumbling soil, that the object of his pursuit had scaled the bank, and he forthwith moderated his career. Halting, he perceived, what he took to be a face peeping at him from behind a knot of alders that overhung, half way up the steep and shelving bank immediately above him. His gun was instantly at his shoulder.

"Come down, you infernal deer-stealing scoundrel," cried Hugh, "or I'll blow you to shivers, that will I, and be d——d to you."

No answer was returned: expostulation was vain; and fearful of placing himself at a disadvantage if he attempted to scale the bank, Hugh fired without further parley. The sharp discharge rolled in echoes down the ravine, and a pheasant, scared at the sound, answered the challenge from a neighbouring tree. Hugh was

an unerring marksman, and on this occasion his aim had been steadily taken. The result was not precisely such as he had anticipated. A fur cap, shaken by the shot from the bough whereon it hung, came rolling down the bank, proclaiming the *ruse* that had been practised upon the keeper. Little time was allowed him for reflection; before he could reload, he felt himself collared by the iron arm of Luke.

The keeper was a man of great personal strength—square-set, bandy-legged, with a prodigious width of chest, and vast volume of muscular power; and energetic as was Luke's assault, he maintained his ground without flinching. The struggle was desperate. Luke was of slighter proportion, though exceeding the keeper, in stature, by the head and shoulders. This superiority availed him little; it was rather a disadvantage in the conflict that ensued. The gripe he fastened upon Hugh's throat was like that of a clenched vice; but he might as well have compressed the neck of a bull, as that of the

stalwart keeper. Defending himself with his hobnail boots, with which he inflicted several severe blows upon Luke's shins, and struggling vehemently, Hugh succeeded in extricating himself from his throttling grasp; he then closed with his foe, and they were locked together like intertwining snakes. In the manner of bears at play, they hugged each other, straining and tugging, and practising every sleight and stratagem coming within the scope of feet, knees, and thighs—now tripping, now jerking, now advancing, now retreating; but all with doubtful result. Victory, at length, seemed to declare itself in favour of the sturdy keeper. Aware of his opponent's strength, it was Luke's chief endeavour to keep his lower limbs disengaged, and to trust more to skill than to force for ultimate success. To prevent this was the keeper's object: he guarded himself against every feint, and ultimately succeeded in firmly grappling his agile assailant. Luke's spine

was almost cracked in twain by the shock, when suddenly he gave way, and, without losing his balance, drew his adversary forward, at the same instant kicking the keeper's right leg from under him, and dashing him backwards. With a crash like that of an uprooted oak, Hugh tumbled, with his foe upon him, into the bed of the rivulet.

Not a word had been spoke during the conflict. A convulsive groan burst from Hugh's hardy breast, enforced by the weighty body above him. His hand sought his girdle, but in vain; his knife was gone. Gazing upwards, his dancing vision encountered the glimmer of the blade—the knife had dropped from its case in the fall—Luke brandished it before his eyes.

"Villain!" gasped Hugh, ineffectually struggling to free himself, "you will not murder me?" And his efforts were desperate.

"No," answered Luke, flinging the uplifted weapon into the brook; "I will not do *that*, though

thou hast twice aimed at my life to-night; but I will silence thee, at all events."—And with that he dealt the keeper a blow on the head that terminated all further resistance on his part. Leaving the inert mass to choke up the current, with whose waters the blood, oozing from the wound, began to commingle, Luke prepared to depart.

His perils were not yet past. Guided by the firing, the report of which alarmed them, the keeper's assistants hastened in the direction whence they imagined the sound proceeded, presenting themselves directly in the path Luke was about to take. He had either to retrace his steps, or face a double enemy. His election was made at once. He turned, and fled.

For an instant the men tarried with their bleeding companion—they dragged him from the brook—then, with loud oaths, followed in hot pursuit.

Threading for a second time the bosky labyrinth, Luke sought the source of the stream. This

was precisely the course his enemies would have selected for him; and when they beheld him take it, they felt confident of his capture. On—on—they sped.

The sides of the hollow became more and more abrupt as they advanced, though less covered with brushwood. The fugitive made no attempt to climb the bank, but still prest forward. The road was tortuous, and wound round a jutting point of rock. Now he was a fair mark—no, he had swept swiftly by, and was out of sight, before a gun could be raised. They reached the same point—he was still before them—but his race was nearly run. Steep slippery rocks, shelving down to the edges of a small but deep pool of water, the source of the stream, formed an apparently insurmountable barrier in that direction. Rooted (heaven knows how?) in some reft or fissure of the rock, grew a wild ash, throwing out a few boughs over the solitary pool; this is all the support Luke can

hope for, should he attempt to scale the rock. The rock was sheer—the pool was deep—yet still he hurried on. He reached the muddy embankment—he mounted its sides—he seemed to hesitate. The keepers were now within a hundred yards—both guns were discharged—and sudden as the reports, with a dead, splashless plunge, like a diving otter, the fugitive dropped into the water.

The pursuers were at the brink. They gazed at the pool. A few bubbles floated upon its surface, and burst. The water was slightly discoloured with sand. No ruddier stain crimsoned the tide—no figure rested on the naked rock—no hand clung to the motionless tree.

"Devil take the rascal," growled one; "I hope he harnt escaped us, after all."

"No—no, he's fast enough, never fear," rejoined the other; "sticking like an eel at the bottom o' the pond; and damn him he deserves it, for he's slip'd out of our fingers, eel fashion,

often enough, to-night. But come, we'll drag for the body in the morning. Let's be moving, and give poor Hugh Badger a helping hand. A pretty business he have made of it, to be sure. Come along."

Whereupon they returned to the assistance of the wounded and discomfited keeper.

CHAPTER VI.

I am right against my House—Seat of my Ancestors!
YORKSHIRE TRAGEDY.

WE shall now conduct our readers to the seat of the family, so frequently alluded to in the preceding chapters.

Rookwood Place, was a fine, old, irregular pile, of considerable size, presenting a rich, picturesque outline, with its innumerable gable-ends, its fantastical coigns, and tall crest of twisted chimneys. There was no uniformity of style about the building, yet the general effect was pleasing and beautiful; its very irregularity constituted its chief charm. Nothing but convenience had been consulted in its construction; additions had from time to time been

made to it, but every thing had dropped into its proper place, and, without apparent effort or design, had grown into an ornament, heightening the beauty of the whole. It was, in short, one of those glorious, manorial houses, that, like realized visions of Eld, sometimes unexpectedly greet us in our wanderings, and gladden us as the discovery of a hidden treasure. Some such ancestral hall (though not precisely of the same character) have we accidentally encountered in unlooked for quarters in our native county of Lancaster, or in its smiling sister shire, and never without feelings of intense delight, rejoicing to behold the freshness of its antiquity and the greenness of its old age; for be it observed, in passing, that a Cheshire or Lancashire Hall, time-honoured though it be, with its often renovated black-and-white squares, fancifully filled up with trefoils and quatrefoils, rosettes, and other figures, seems to bear its years so lightly, that its age, so far from detracting

from its beauty, only lends it a grace; and the same mansion, to all outward appearance, fresh and perfect as it existed in the days of Elizabeth, may be seen in admirable preservation in the days of William our Liege. Such is Bramall—such Moreton, and many others which we could name: the former of these houses may, perhaps, be instanced as the best specimen of its class (and its class, in our opinion, *is* the best) to be met with in the shire, considered with reference either to the finished decoration of its exterior, rich in the chequered colouring we have alluded to, preserved with a care and neatness almost Dutch, or to the consistent taste exhibited by its high-minded owner in the restoration and maintenance of all its original and truly national beauty within doors. As an illustration of old English hospitality (that real, hearty, boundless hospitality, for which the Squirearchy of this country was once so famous—ah! why have they bartered it for other customs less substantially *English?*)

—may be mentioned, that a road conducted the passenger directly through the great hall of this house, literally "of entertainment," where, if he listed, strong ale, and other refreshments, awaited his acceptance, and courted his stay. Well might old King, the Cheshire chronicler, in the pride of his honest heart, exclaim, "I know divers men, who are but farmers, that in their housekeeping may compare with a lord or baron, in some countries beyond the seas;—yea, although I named a higher degree, I were able to justify it." We have no such "golden farmers" in these degenerate days.

The mansion was originally built by Sir Ranulph de Rookwood, the first of the name, a stout Yorkist, who flourished in the reign of Edward the Fourth, and received the fair domain and broad lands upon which the edifice was raised, at the hands of his sovereign, in reward for good service, retiring thither in the decline of life, at the close of the wars of the Roses, to sequestrate himself

from scenes of strife, and to consult his spiritual weal in the erection and endowment of the neighbouring church. It was of mixed architecture, and combined many of the peculiarities of each era. Retaining some of the sterner features of earlier days, the period ere yet the embattled manor-house peculiar to the reigns of the later Henries had been merged in the graceful and peaceable Hall, the residence of the Rookwoods had early anticipated the gentler characteristics of a later day, though it could boast little of that exuberance of external ornament, that luxuriance of design, and prodigality of beauty, which, under the sway of the Virgin Queen, distinguished the residence of the wealthier English landowner, and rendered the Hall of Elizabeth, properly so called, the pride and boast of our Domestic Architecture.

The site which Sir Ranulph had selected for his habitation, had been already occupied by a vast fabric of oak, which he in part removed, though some vestiges might still be traced of

that ancient structure. A massive pile succeeded, with gate and tower, court and moat complete, stable enough, one would have thought, to have endured for centuries; but even this substantial change grew into disuse, and Sir Ranulph's successors, remodelling, repairing, almost rebuilding the whole mansion, in the end so metamorphosed its aspect, that at last little of its original and distinctive character remained. Still, as we said before, it was a fine, old house, though some changes had taken place for the worse, which could not be readily pardoned by the eye of taste: as, for instance, the deep, embayed windows, had sunk into modernized casements, of lighter construction; the wide porch, with its flight of steps leading to the great hall of entrance, had yielded to a narrow door; and the broad, quadrangular court was occupied by a gravel drive. Yet, despite all these mutations, the house of the Rookwoods, for an old house (and, after all, what is like a good, old house?) was no

undesirable, or uncongenial abode for any worshipful country gentleman "that hath a great estate."

The Hall was situated near the base of a gently declining hill, terminating a noble avenue of limes, and partially embosomed in an immemorial wood of that same timber, which had given its name to the family that dwelt amongst its rook-peopled shades. Descending the avenue at the point of access afforded by a road that wound down the hill-side, towards a village distant about half a mile, as you advanced, the eye was first arrested by a singular octagonal turret of brick, of more recent original than the house, though in all probability occupying the place where the bartizan'd gateway stood of yore. This tower rose to a height corresponding with the roof of the mansion, and was embellished on the side facing the house, with a flamingly gilt time-piece, peering, like an impudent observer, at all that passed within doors; two apartments, which it contained, were appropriated to the house-

porter. Despoiled of its martial honours, the gateway still displayed the achievements of the family, carved in granite, which had resisted the storms of two centuries, though stained green with moss, and mapped over with lichens. To the left, overgrown with ivy, and peeping from out a tuft of trees, appeared the summit of the dovecot, indicating the near neighbourhood of an ancient barn, contemporary with the earliest dwelling-house, and of a little world of offices and out-buildings, that lay buried in the thickness of the foliage. To the right was the garden—the pleasaunce of the place—formal, precise, old-fashioned, artificial, yet exquisite !—(for commend us to the bygone, beautiful, English garden—*really a garden*—not that mixture of park, meadow, and wilderness*,

* Payne Knight, the scourge of Repton and his school, speaking of the licence indulged in by the modern landscape gardeners, thus vents his indignation:—

" But here, once more, ye rural muses weep—
The ivy'd balustrade, and terrace steep—
Walls—mellowed into harmony by time—
On which fantastic creepers used to climb—

brought up to one's very windows—which, since the days of the innovators, Kent, and his "bold associates," Capability Brown and Co., has obtained so largely)—this *was* a garden! There might have been seen the stately terraces, such as Watteau, and our own Wilson, in his earlier works, painted—the trim alleys, exhibiting all the triumphs of Topiarian art—

> The sidelong walls,
> Of shaven yew; the holly's prickly arms,
> Trim'd into high arcades; the tonsile box,
> Wove in mosaic mode of many a curl,
> Around the figured carpet of the lawn*.

the gayest of parterres and greenest of lawns, with its admonitory sun-dial, its marble basin in the centre, its fountain, and conched water-god—the quaint summer-house, surmounted

* Mason's English Garden.

> While statues, labyrinths, and alleys pent
> Within their bounds, at least were innocent!—
> *Our modern taste, alas! no limit knows;*
> *O'er hill, o'er dale, through wood and field it flows;*
> *Spreading o'er all its unprolific spawn,*
> *In never-ending sheets of vapid lawn.*"—
>
> The Landscape, a didactic Poem, addressed to Uvedale Price, Esq.

with its gilt vane—the statue, glimmering from out its covert of leaves—the cool cascade—the urns—the bowers—and a hundred luxuries beside, suggested and contrived by Art to render Nature most enjoyable, and to enhance the recreative delights of home-out-of-doors (for such a garden should be), with least sacrifice of in-door comfort and convenience.

> When Epicurus to the world had taught,
> That pleasure was the chiefest good;
> (And was perhaps i' th' right, if rightly understood)
> His life he to his doctrine brought—
> And in his garden's shade that sovereign pleasure sought*.

All these delights might once have been enjoyed; but at the time of which we write, this fair garden was for the most part a waste. Ill kept, neglected, unregarded, the gay parterres were disfigured with weeds—grass grew on the gravel walk—several of the urns were overthrown—the hour upon the dial was untold—the fountain choked up, and the smooth-shaven lawn only rescued, it would seem, from

* Cowley.

the general fate, that it might answer the purpose of a bowling green, as the implements of that game, scattered about, plainly testified.

Diverging from the garden to the house, we have before remarked that the more ancient characteristic features of the place had been for the most part obliterated and destroyed, less by the hand of time than to suit the tastes of different proprietors; this, however, was not so observable in the eastern wing, which overlooked the garden. Here might be discerned many indications of its antiquity. The strength and solidity of the walls, which had not been, as elsewhere, masked with brick-work—the low, Tudor arches—the mullioned bars of the windows—all attested its age. Within, this wing was occupied by an upper and lower gallery, communicating with suites of chambers, for the most part deserted, excepting one or two, which were used as dormitories, and another little room on the ground-floor, with an oriel window opening upon the lawn, and commanding the

prospect beyond—a favourite resort for the matutine refection of the late Sir Piers; the interior was curious for its ceiling, moulded in plaster, with the arms and alliances of the Rookwoods. In the centre was the royal blazon of Elizabeth, who had once honoured the hall with a visit during a progress.

To return, for a moment, to the garden, which we linger about as a bee around a flower: —below the lawn there was another terrace, edged by a low balustrade of stone, which commanded a lovely view of park, water, and woodland—high hanging woods in the foreground, and an extensive sweep of flat champaign country, stretching out to meet a line of blue, hazy hills that bounded the distant horizon.

From the house to its inhabitants, the transition is natural. Besides the connection between them, there were many points of resemblance—many family features in common—the same original grandeur, the same character of romance,

the same fanciful display. Nor were the secret passages, peculiar to the one, wanting to the history of the other: both had their mysteries. One blot there was in the otherwise proud escutcheon of the Rookwoods, that dimmed its splendour, and made pale its pretensions: their sun was eclipsed in blood from its rising to its meridian; and so it seemed would be its setting. This foul reproach attached to all the race;—none escaped it. Traditional rumours were handed down from father to son, throughout the county, and, like all other rumours, had taken to themselves wings, and flown abroad: their crimes became a by-word. How was it they escaped punishment? How came they to evade the hand of justice? Proof was ever wanting—justice ever baffled. They were a stern and stiff-necked people, of indomitable pride and unconquerable resolution, with, for the most part, force of character sufficient to enable them to breast difficulties and dangers that would have overwhelmed

ordinary individuals. No quality is so advantageous to its possessor as firmness—every obstacle will yield to it, and the determined energy of the Rookwoods bore them harmless through a sea of troubles; besides, they had taken their measures properly. They were wealthy; lavish even to profusion—and gold will do much, if skilfully administered; yet, despite of all this, a dark, ominous cloud settled over their house, and men wondered when the vengeance of Heaven, so long delayed, would fall, and consume it.

Possessed of considerable landed property, once extending over nearly half a county, the family increased in power and importance for an uninterrupted series of years, until the outbreak of that intestine discord which ended in the Civil Wars, when the espousal of the royalist party, with sword and substance, by Sir Ralph Rookwood, the then lord of the mansion (a dissolute, depraved personage, who, however, had been made a Knight of the Bath at the corona-

tion of Charles I.) ended in his own destruction at Naseby, and the wreck of much of his property; a loss, which the gratitude of Charles II., on his restoration, did not fail to make good to Sir Ralph's youthful heir.

The young Sir Reginald had attended Charles in the character of page during his exile, and if he could not requite the devotion of the son by absolutely reinstating the fallen fortunes of the father, the Monarch could at least accord him the fostering influence of his favour and countenance, and bestow upon him certain lucrative situations in his household, as an earnest of his good-will; and thus much he did. Remarkable for his personal attractions in youth, it is not to be wondered at that we should find the name of Reginald Rookwood recorded in the scandalous chronicles of the day, as belonging to a cavalier of infinite address and discretion, matchless wit, and marvellous pleasantry, and eminent beyond his peers for his successes with

some of the most distinguished beauties that ornamented that brilliant and voluptuous court.

A career of elegant dissipation ended in matrimony. His first match was unpropitious. Foiled in his attempts upon the chastity of a lady of great beauty, and high honour, he was rash enough to marry her: rash enough, we say, for from that fatal hour all became as darkness; the curtain fell upon the comedy of his life, to rise to tragic horrors. When passion subsided, repentance awoke, and he became anxious for deliverance from the yoke he had so heedlessly imposed on himself and on his unfortunate lady. Her's was a wretched life of sufferance from domestic tyranny and oppression; but it was brief: her end has been already hinted at. The manner of its occurrence we shall now more fully detail.

The hapless lady of Sir Reginald was a fair and fragile creature, floating in the eddying current of existence, and hurried to destruc-

tion as the summer gossamer is swept away by the rude breeze, and lost for ever. So beautiful, so gentle was she, that if

> Sorrow had not made
> Sorrow more beautiful than Beauty's self,

it would have been difficult to say whether the charm of softness, and sweetness, was more to be admired than her faultless personal attractions; but when a tinge of sorrow came saddening and shading the once smooth and smiling brow—when tears dimmed the blue beauty of those deep and tender eyes—when hot, hectic flushes supplied the place of healthful bloom, and despair took possession of her heart, then was it seen *what* was the charm of Lady Rookwood, if charm that could be called, which was a saddening sight to see, and melted the beholder's soul within him; and all acknowledged, that exquisite as she had been before, the sad, sweet lady was now more exquisite still.

Seven moons had waned and flown—seven bitter, tearful moons—and each day Lady Rook-

wood's situation claimed more soothing attention at the hand of her lord. She had it not. Fascinating as sin was Sir Reginald, if it pleased him; ruthless as the striped tiger, if not in the mood to constrain himself.

About this time his wife's brother, whom he hated, returned from the Dutch wars. Struck with his sister's altered appearance, he readily divined the cause: indeed, all tongues were eager to proclaim it to him. Passionately attached to her, Lionel Vavasour implored an explanation of the cause of his sister's griefs. The bewildered lady answered evasively, attributing her wo-begone looks to any other cause than her husband's cruelty, and pressing her brother, as he valued her peace, her affection, never to allude to the subject again. The fiery youth departed; he next sought out his brother-in-law, and taxed him sharply with his inhumanity, adding threats to his upbraidings. Sir Reginald listened silently and calmly. When the other had finished, with a sarcastic obeisance, he replied, " Sir, I am much

beholden for the trouble you have taken in your sister's behalf; but when she entrusted herself to my keeping, she relinquished, I conceive, all claim on *your* guardianship: however, I thank you in her name, for the trouble you have taken, but for your own sake, I would venture, as a friend, to caution you against a repetition of interference like the present."

"Interference! Sir Reginald?"

"Interference, Sir, was my word; unwarrantable impertinence were perhaps the more suitable phrase. I give you your choice; but would again renew my caution."

"And I, Sir, caution *you*. See that you give heed to my words, or, by the living God, I will enforce attention to them."

"You will find me, Sir, as prompt at all times to defend my conduct, as I am unalterable in my purposes. I love your sister not, I loathe her. She is my wife; what more would you have? Were she a harlot, you should have her back and welcome; but the fool is virtuous.

Devise some scheme, and take her with you hence—so you rid *me* of her, I am content."

"Sir Reginald, you are a villain."

"Go on."

"A ruffian."

"Proceed, I pray you."

"A dastard! will nothing rouse you?" and Vavasour spat upon his brother's cheek.

Sir Reginald's eyes blazed. His sword started from its scabbard. "Defend yourself," he exclaimed, furiously attacking Vavasour. Pass after pass was exchanged; fierce thrusts made and parried; feint and appeal, the most desperate and dexterous, resorted to; their swords glanced like lightning flashes; till in the struggle the blades became entangled. There was a moment's cessation; each glanced at the other with deadly inextinguishable hate. Both were admirable masters of defence; both so brimful of wrath as to be regardless of consequences. They tore back their weapons. Vavasour's blade shivered. He was at the mercy of his adver-

sary—an adversary who knew no mercy. Sir Reginald's rapier was instantly passed through his body, the hilt striking against his ribs.

Sir Reginald's ire was kindled, not extinguished, by the deed he had done; like the tiger, he had tasted blood. He sought his home. He was greeted by his wife. Terrified by his looks, she yet summoned courage sufficient to approach him. She embraced his arm—she clasped his hand. Sir Reginald smiled. It was cutting as his dagger's edge.

"What ails you, sweetheart?" said he.

"I know not; your smile frightens me."

"My smile frightens you—fool! be thankful that I frown not."

"Oh! do not frown. Be gentle, my Reginald, as you were when first I knew you. Smile not in that stern wise, but as you did then, that I may, for one instant, dream you love me, as you swore you did."

"Dream that I love you!"

"Ay, dream, my Reginald; it is no longer a

reality. I feel your love is gone—that I have lost ——. But oh! let me not think you are utterly insensible to me. Smile! smile! if but for a moment."

"Silly wench! There—I *do* smile."

"That smile chills me—freezes me. Oh Reginald! could you but know what I have endured this morning, on your account. My brother Lionel has been here."

"Well!"

"Nay, look not so. He insisted on knowing the reason of my altered appearance."

"And no doubt you made him acquainted with the cause. You told him *your* version of the story."

"Not a word, as I hope to live."

"A lie."

"By my truth, no."

"A lie, I say; he avouched it to me himself."

"Impossible! He could not."

"'Tis a tale he will not repeat."

"Not repeat? He would not, I am sure, give

utterance to any scandal. You do but try me. Reginald, I never saw you thus—never before. Ha! what is this? Your hand is bloody. You have not—speak—you could not. As you hope for heaven's mercy, speak, I implore you. You have not harmed him? He is well. He is well. Whose blood is this?"

"He spat upon my cheek—I have washed out the stain—"

"Then it *is* his," shrieked Lady Rookwood, pressing her hands shudderingly before her eyes. "Is he dead? Does he yet live?"

Sir Reginald turned away.

"Stay," cried she, exerting her feeble strength to retain him, and becoming white as ashes, "stay, thou thing of blood! thou cruel and perjured one! abide, and hear me. Me thou hast killed, I feel, with thy unkindness. I have striven against it, but it would not avail. I am sinking fast—dying. I, who loved thee, only thee; yea, one beside—my brother, and thou hast slain *him*. Thy hands are dripping in his blood, and I

have kissed them, have clasped them. And now," continued she, with an energy that shook Sir Reginald, "I hate thee—I abhor thee—I renounce thee—for ever! May my dying words ring in thine ears on thy death-bed, for that hour *will* come. Thou canst not shun *that*. Then think of *him!* think of *me!*"

"Away!" interrupted Sir Reginald, endeavouring to shake her off.

"I will not away! I will cling to thee,—I will curse thee. My unborn child shall live to curse thee—to requite thee—to visit my wrongs on thee and thine. Weak as I am, thou shalt not cast me off Thou shalt learn to fear even *me*."

"I fear nothing living, much less a frantic woman."

"Fear the *dead* then."

"Hence! or by the God above us ——"

"Never!"

There was a struggle—a blow—and the wretched lady sank, shrieking, upon the floor.

Convulsions seized her; a mother's pains succeeded fierce and fast. She spoke no more, but died within the hour, giving birth to a female child.

Eleanor Rookwood lived to fulfil her mother's boding words. She became her father's idol—her father's bane. All the love he had to bestow was centred in her; she returned it not. She fled from his caresses. Inheriting none of her mother's gentleness, she had all her mother's beauty—with all her father's pride. His every thought was for his daughter—for her aggrandizement—all in vain. She seemed only to endure him, while his affection waxed stronger, and entwined itself round her alone; yet she shrank from his embraces as the shrub from the clasping folds of the parasite plant. She grew towards womanhood. Suitors thronged around her—gentle and noble ones. Sir Reginald watched them with a jealous eye. He was wealthy—powerful—high in royal favour;—and could make his own election—he did so. For

the first time, Eleanor promised obedience to his wishes. They accorded with her own humour. The day was appointed—it came—but with it came not the bride. She had fled, with the humblest and the meanest of the pretenders to her hand—with one upon whom Sir Reginald supposed she had not deigned to cast her eyes. He endeavoured to forget her, and to all outward seeming was successful in the effort; but he felt that the curse was upon him, the undying flame scorched his heart. Once and once only they met again, in a foreign land, whither she had wandered. It was a dread encounter—terrible to both; but most so to Sir Reginald. He spoke not of her afterwards.

Shortly after the death of his first wife, Sir Reginald had made proposals to a dowager of distinction, with a handsome jointure, one of his early attachments, and was without scruple accepted. The power of the family might then be said to have been at its zenith, and but for certain untoward circumstances, and the

growing influence of his enemies, Sir Reginald would have been elevated to the peerage. Like most reformed spendthrifts, he had become proportionately avaricious, and his mind seemed engrossed in accumulating wealth. In the meantime, his second wife followed her predecessor, dying, it was said, of vexation and disappointment.

The propensity to matrimony, always a distinguishing characteristic of the Rookwoods, largely displayed itself in Sir Reginald. Another lady followed—equally rich, younger, and far more beautiful than her immediate predecessor. She was a prodigious flirt, and soon set her husband at defiance. Sir Reginald did not condescend to expostulate. It was not his way. He effectually prevented any recurrence. She was removed, and with her expired Sir Reginald's waning popularity. So strong was the expression of odium against him, that he thought it prudent to retire to his mansion in the country, and there altogether seclude himself. One

anomaly in Sir Reginald's otherwise utterly selfish character, was uncompromising devotion to the House of Stuart; and shortly after the abdication of James II., he followed that monarch to St. Germains, having previously mixed largely in secret political intrigues; and only returned from the French Court to lay his bones with those of his ancestry, in the family vault at Rookwood.

Sir Reginald died, leaving issue three children, a daughter, the before-mentioned Eleanor (who, entirely discountenanced by the family, had been seemingly forgotten by all but her father), and two sons by his third wife. Reginald, the eldest, whose military taste had early procured him the command of a company of horse, and whose politics did not coalesce with that of his sire, fell, during his father's lifetime, at Killycrankie, under the banners of William; Piers, therefore, the second son, succeeded to the baronetcy. A very different character, in many respects, to his father

and brother, holding in supreme contempt courts and courtiers, party warfare, political intrigue, and all the subtleties of jesuitical diplomacy; neither having any inordinate relish for camps or campaigns; he yet displayed in early life one family propensity, *viz.* unremitting devotion to the sex; and if he rejoiced not in a like uxorial latitude, yet were his mistresses manifold. Subsequently he allied himself to Maude, only daughter of Sir Thomas D'Aubeney, the last of a line as proud and intolerant as his own. The tables were then turned; Lady Rookwood usurped sovereign sway over her lord, and Sir Piers, a cipher in his own house, scarce master of himself, much less of his dame, endured an existence so infinitely miserable, that he was often heard to regret, in his cups, that he had not inherited, with the estate of his forefathers, the family secret of shaking off the matrimonial yoke, when found to press too hardly.

At the onset Sir Piers struggled hard to burst his bondage, but in vain—he was fast fettered,

and only bruised himself against the bars of his prison-house. Abandoning all further effort at emancipation, he gave himself up to the usual resource of a weak mind—debauchery ; he drank so deeply to drown his cares, that in the end his hale constitution yielded to his excesses. Sir Piers was a good-humoured man in the main; he had little of the old Rookwood leaven about him, and had been liked by his associates ; but of late his temper became soured, and his friends deserted him ; for between his domestic annoyances, remorseful feelings, and the inroads already made upon his health by constant inebriety, he grew so desperate and insane in his revels, and committed such fearful extravagancies, that even his boon companions shrank from his orgies. Fearful were the scenes between him and Lady Rookwood upon these occasions—appalling to the witnesses, dreadful to themselves; and it was perhaps their frequent recurrence, that, more than any thing else, banished all decent society from Rookwood.

At the time of Sir Piers' decease, which brings us down to the date of our story, his son and successor, Ranulph, was absent on his travels. Shortly after the completion of his academical education, he had departed to make the tour of the Continent, and had been absent rather better than a year. He had quitted his father in displeasure, and was destined never again to see his face while living. The last intelligence received of young Rookwood was from Bourdeaux, whence it was thought he had departed for the Pyrenees. A special messenger had been dispatched in search of him, with tidings of the melancholy event; but as it was deemed improbable, by Lady Rookwood, that her son could return within any reasonable space, she ordered that the accomplishment of the last rites to be paid to her husband should take place on the night of the sixth day after his decease (for it may be here remarked, that it was the custom of the Rookwoods ever to inter their dead at midnight), entrusting its solemnization

entirely to the care of one of Sir Piers' retainers, for which she was greatly scandalized in the neighbourhood.

A youth of goodly promise was Ranulph Rookwood. The stock from which he sprang would on neither side warrant such conclusion, nor hold out hopes of any such fulfilment; yet sometimes it happens that from the darkest elements are compounded the brightest and subtlest substances: and so it appeared to be in his instance. Fair, frank, and free—generous, open, unsuspicious—he seemed the very opposite of all his race—their antagonizing principle. Capriciously indulgent, his father had allowed him ample means, neither curbing nor restraining his expenditure; acceding at one moment to every inclination, every project, and the next negativing all. It was impossible, therefore, for him, in such a state of things, to act decidedly, without incurring his father's displeasure; and even the only measure he resolved upon, which was to absent himself for a time, was conjec-

tured to have brought about the result he had endeavoured to avoid. Other reasons there were, which secretly influenced him, which it will be our business in due time to detail.

Much of this might be traced to the policy of Lady Rookwood. Of late, whatever plans she had laid out for her son, had been opposed by Sir Piers, who was resolved to thwart and gall her in her only apparently sensible part; and hence the endless bickerings we have noticed. There might be another latent motive; but this, if any such existed, Sir Piers kept to himself. After his son's departure, he supplied him plentifully with money; but it was observed, by those about him, that he meditated some great change in the distribution of his property, even during his lifetime, when the suddenness of his removal, by death, prevented the completion of his designs.

The time of the sad ceremonial drew nigh. The hurrying of the domestics to and fro—
—the multifarious arrangements for the night—

the distribution of the melancholy trappings, and the discussion of the concomitant *comestibles*, furnished abundant occupation within doors; without, there was a constant and continual stream of the tenantry, thronging down the avenue, mixed with an occasional horseman, once or twice intercepted by a large, lumbering carriage, bringing friends of the deceased, some really anxious to pay the last tribute of regard, but the majority attracted by the anticipated spectacle of a funeral by torchlight. There were others, indeed, to whom it was not matter of choice; who were compelled, by a vassal tenure of their lands, held of the house of Rookwood, to lend a shoulder to the coffin, and a hand to the torch, on the burial of its lord. Of these there was a plentiful muster collected in the hall; they were to be marshalled by Peter Bradley, who was deemed to be well skilled in the proceedings, having been present at two solemnities of the kind. That personage, however, had not made his appearance, to the great

dismay of the assemblage. Scouts were sent in search of him, but they returned with the intelligence, that the door of his habitation was fastened, and its inmate apparently absent; other tidings of the truant sexton could not be obtained.

It was a sultry August evening—no breeze was stirring in the garden—no cool dews refreshed the parched and heated earth—yet, from the languishing flowers rich sweets exhaled; the splash of a fountain fell pleasantly upon the ear, conveying in its sound a sense of freshness to the fervid air—while deep and drowsy murmurs hummed heavily beneath the trees, making the twilight slumberously musical. The westering sun, which had filled the atmosphere with flame throughout the day, was now wildly setting; and, as he sank behind the hall, its varied and beautiful tracery became each instant more darkly and distinctly defined, as relieved against the burnished sky.

At this juncture a little gate, communicating

with the park, was thrown open, and some one entered the garden, passing through the shrubbery, and not checking his rapid steps till he arrived at a vista opening upon the house: there he stopped. The spot at which he halted, was marked by a little basin, scantily supplied with water, streaming from a lion's kingly jaws. The stranger threw himself upon an adjoining seat. His dress was travel-soiled, and dusty, and his whole appearance betokened great exhaustion, from heat and fatigue. As he threw off his riding-cap, and unclasped his throat collar, he displayed a finely-turned head and neck, and a countenance which, besides its beauty, had that rare nobility of feature, which seldom indeed falls to the lot of the proudest patrician, but is never seen in one of an inferior order. A restless disquietude of manner, showed that he was suffering from over-excitement of mind, as well as from bodily exertion. His look was wild and hurried—his waving ringlets were dashed heedlessly over a pallid, lofty brow, upon which care

was prematurely written, while his black melancholy eyes were bent, with a look almost of agony, upon the house before him.

"And it was here," murmured the youthful stranger, "that we parted, never again to meet—here he left me, in anger and unkindness—and here, upon this very spot, I tarried till the sun had gone down upon his wrath, even as it is now going down upon his grave—and he returned not! And that farewell—that dreadful farewell, was to be our last! Great God!—had I but thought it—that I should have departed without his blessing—without his forgiveness. But the past is irrevocable. Oh! for one half hour with him, were it terrible as the night when—— but I will not think of *that*. I must believe it now—the dark, dreadful confirmation is there. In yon mansion death stares at me through every casement—grins at me in my path—my father lies dead within! If even the dead cannot rest, why need the living trouble themselves? That twilight sky—yon setting sun—why do

they fill me with forebodings?—why does the air seem thick—the trees grow black—the clouds turn crimson? 'Tis death!—death every where!—around me—about me—my existence is poisoned. I have obeyed the call—I am here—what more remains to do?"

And, as if struggling against violent emotions, and some overwhelming remembrance, the young man arose, and plunged his hand into the basin, applying the moist element to his burning brow. Apparently becoming more calm, he bent his steps towards the hall, when two figures, suddenly issuing from an adjoining walk, arrested his progress: neither saw him. After a brief parley, one of the figures disappeared within the shrubbery, and the other, confronting the stranger, displayed the harsh features and gaunt form of Peter Bradley. Had Peter encountered his dead master in corporeal form, he could not have manifested more surprise than he exhibited for an instant or two, when he shrank back from the path as the

stranger passed him with a low greeting, taking his way towards the hall.

"Wonder upon wonders!" ejaculated the sexton, recovering speech; "young Ranulph here! —what could have brought him hither, now? What but fate? The hour I have so long dreamed of is fast coming; but Luke should know this—he may still be within hearing; I'll try—" and he whistled down the shrubbery— "No—he is gone—it would be too much trouble to seek for him—besides, he must take his chance —I can only help him so far—Destiny must do the rest. And who shall say what his shall be?— Not I. I can only speculate—only look on— only laugh. I know better than to interfere with any man's doom, and yet I should like to see young Ranulph's palm. I might give a guess from that. It will be a hard game. Ha—ha! What says the old jingle—

When the stray Rook shall perch on the topmost bough,
There shall be clamour and screeching I trow;
But of right to, and rule of the ancient nest,
The Rook that with Rook mates shall hold him possest.

which is a riddle I cannot read. Oh! this is beautiful—delightful!—and now for my merry mourners. They're drunk I hope by this time—in which case they'll do their business so much the better, and not shed tears out of season."

And he crawled, mutteringly, on to the hall.

CHAPTER VII.

"No more *plurimums*, if you love me: Latin whole-meats are now minced, and served in for English gallimaufries; let us, therefore, cut out our uplandish neat's tongues, and talk like regenerate Britons."

Westward Ho.

An hour or two prior to the rencontre just described, in a small cosy apartment of the hall, nominally devoted to justiciary business by its late proprietor, but, in reality, used as a sanctum snuggery, or smoking room, an odd triumvirate were assembled, fraught with the ulterior view of attending the funeral obsequies of their deceased patron and friend, though immediately occupied in the discussion of a stoup of excellent claret, the *bouquet* of which perfumed the air like the fragrance of a bed of violets.

This little room had been poor Sir Piers's favourite retreat; it was, in fact, the only room in the house that he could call his own; and thither would he often, with pipe and punch, beguile the flagging hours, secure from interruption. A snug, old-fashioned apartment it was, wainscotted with rich, black oak, against which stood a fine old cabinet of the same material, and a line or two of crazy worm-eaten book-shelves, loaded with sundry, dusty, unconsulted law tomes, and a slight sprinkling of the elder divines, equally neglected. The only book, indeed, Sir Piers ever read, was Burton, and him only because the quaint, racy style of the learned old hypochondriac suited his humour at seasons, and gave a zest to his melancholy, such as the olives lent to his wine.

Four portraits adorned the walls; those of Sir Reginald Rookwood and his wives. The ladies were attired in the flowing drapery of Charles's day, the snow of their radiant bosoms somewhat sullied by over exposure, and

the vermeil tinting of their cheeks darkened by the fumes of tobacco. There was a shepherdess, with her taper crook, whose large, languishing eyes, ripe pouting lips, ready to melt into kisses, and air of voluptuous elegance, was any thing but suitable to the innocent, unsophisticated simplicity of her costume. She was pourtrayed tending her flock of downy sheep, with azure ribbons round their necks, accompanied by one of those invaluable little dogs, whose length of ear and delicacy of spot evinced him perfect in his breeding, but whose large-eyed indifference to his charge, proved him to be as much out of character with his situation, as the refined and luxuriant charms of his mistress were out of keeping with her artless attire. This was Sir Piers's mother, the third wife, a beautiful woman, answering to the notion of one who had been somewhat of a flirt in her day. Next to her was a magnificent dame, with the throat and arm of a Juno, and a superb bust (the bust was, then, what the bustle

is now—a paramount attraction—whether the modification be an improvement, we leave to the consideration of the lovers of the beautiful)—this was the dowager. Lastly, there was the sweet, delicate Eleanor, with eyes serenely soft "as a star in water," blue as the depths of a summer's eve, and a form lightsomely lovely as that of a sylph. Every gentle grace had been stamped in undying beauty on the canvas by the hand of Lely, breathing a spell on the picture, almost as witching as that which had dwelt around the exquisite original. Over the high carved mantel-piece was suspended the portrait of Sir Reginald. It had been painted in early youth; the features were beautiful, disdainful—with a fierceness breaking through the courtly air. The eyes were very fine, large, black as midnight, and stern as those of Cæsar Borgia, in Raphael's unrivalled picture in the Borghese Palace at Rome. They seemed to rivet the gazer—to retort his glances—to follow him whithersoever he went—to search into his soul, as did the dark orbs of

Sir Reginald in his lifetime. It was the work of Vandyck, and had all the fidelity and breathing verisimilitude of that great master; nor was the noble countenance of Sir Reginald unworthy the masterly painter.

No portrait of Sir Piers was to be met with; but in lieu thereof, depending from a pair of buck's horns, hung the worthy knight's stained scarlet coat (the same in which he had ridden forth, with the intent to hunt, on the eventful morning mentioned by Peter Bradley), his velvet cap, his buck-handled whip, and the residue of his equipment for the chase. This attire was reviewed with melancholy interest and unaffected emotion by the company, as reminding them forcibly of the departed, of which it seemed a portion.

The party consisted of the Vicar of Rookwood, Dr. Polyphemus Polycarp Small, and Titus Tyrconnel, self-dubbed M.D., an emigrant, and empirical professor of medicine, from the sister isle, whose convivial habits had first intro-

duced him to the hall, and afterwards retained him there. Mr. Cecil Coates, attorney-at-law, bailiff, and receiver, completed the trio. We were wrong in saying that Titus Tyrconnel was *retained.* He was an impudent, intrusive fellow, whom, having once gained a footing in the house, it was impossible to dislodge. He cared for no insult—perceived no slight—and professed, in her presence, the profoundest respect for Lady Rookwood: in short, he was ever ready to do any thing but depart.

Sir Piers was one of those people who cannot dine alone. He disliked a solitary repast, almost as much as a *tête-à-tête* with his lady. He would have been recognised at once as the true Amphitryon, had any one been hardy enough to play the part of Jupiter. Ever ready to give a dinner, he found a difficulty arise, not usually experienced on such occasions—there was no one wherewithal to partake of it. He had the best of wine, kept an excellent table, was himself no niggard host; but his own merits, and those

of his table, were forgotten in the invariable *pendant* to the feast; and the best of wine lost its flavour when the last bottle found its way to the guest's head. Dine alone, Sir Piers would not; and as his old friends forsook him, he plunged lower in his search for society, collecting within his house a class of persons whom no one would have expected to meet at Rookwood, nor its owner have chosen as its inmates, had any choice remained to him. He did not endure this state of things without much outward show of discontent. "Any thing for a quiet life," was his constant saying; and, like the generality of people with whom those words form a favourite maxim, he led the most uneasy life imaginable. Endurance, to excite commiseration, must be uncomplaining—the aggrieved of the gentle sex should remember this. Sir Piers endured, but he grumbled lustily, and was on all hands voted a bore; domestic grievances, especially if the husband be the plaintiff, being the most intolerable of all mentionable miseries.

Racked by a sick head-ache, or querulous with qualms (for there is a bathos of ebriety beyond soda-water), Sir Piers was the most injured man breathing, and consequently the most wearisome. No wonder that his friends deserted him; still there was Titus Tyrconnel—his ears and lips were ever open to pathos and to punch —so Titus kept his station. Immediately after her husband's demise, it had been Lady Rookwood's intention to clear the house of all the vermin, so she expressed herself, that had so long infested it; and forcibly to eject Titus, and one or two other intruders of the same class. But in consequence of certain hints received from Mr. Coates, who represented to her the absolute necessity of complying with Sir Piers's testamentary instructions, which were particular in that respect, she thought proper to defer her intentions until after the ceremonial of interment should be completed; and in the mean time, strange to say, committed its arrangement to Titus Tyrconnel; who, ever ready to accommo-

date, accepted, nothing loath, the charge, and acquitted himself admirably well in his undertaking; especially, as he said, "in the eating and drinking part of the transaction—the most essential portion of it all." He kept open house—open hall—open cellar—resolved that his patron's funeral should emulate as much as possible an Irish burial on a grand scale, "the finest sight in the whole world," again to quote his own words.

No opposition was offered to these proceedings by Lady Rookwood. She had given Titus the keys of the cellar, saying to her attendant Agnes— "they might wallow in wine if they liked—like swine, as they were—it was Sir Piers's will—they only acted in accordance with his intentions, which they fulfilled to the letter. The period, required by the law, would soon be past—she would *then* easily rid herself of them."

Inflated with the importance of his office—inflamed with heat, sat Titus, like a "robustious periwig-pated" Alderman, after a civic feast.—

The natural rubicundity of his rosily comic countenance was increased to a deep purple tint, like that of a full blown peony, while his ludicrous dignity was augmented by a shining suit of sables, in which his portly person was invested.

The first magnum had been discussed in solemn silence; the cloud, however, which hung over the conclave, disappeared, under the genial influence of "another and a better" bottle, and gave place to a denser vapour, occasioned by the introduction of the pipe, and its accompaniments.

Ensconced in a comfortable old chair (it is not every old chair that *is* comfortable), with pipe in mouth, and in full unbuttoned ease, his bushy, buzz wig laid aside by reason of the heat, reposed Doctor Small. Small, indeed, was somewhat of a misnomer, as applied to the worthy doctor, who, besides being no diminutive specimen of his kind, entertained no insignificant opinion of himself. His height was certainly not remarkable; but his width of shoulder—his sesquipedality of stomach—and obesity of

calf—these were unique! Of his origin, we know nothing; but presume he must, in some way or other, have been connected with that numerous family "the Smalls," who, according to Christopher North, form the predominant portion of mankind.

In appearance, the doctor was short-necked, and puffy, with a pasty face, wherein were set eyes, whose obliquity of vision was, in a measure, redeemed by their expression of humour. He was accounted a man of parts and erudition, and had obtained high honours at his university. Rigidly orthodox, he abominated the very name of papist; amongst which heretical herd he classed his companion, Mr. Titus Tyrconnel—Ireland being with him synonimous with superstition and Catholicism—and every Irishman rebellious and schismatical; on this subject he was inclined to be disputatious. His prejudices did not prevent him from passing the claret, nor from his laughing as heartily as a plethoric asthma, and sense of the decorum due to the occasion would permit,

at the quips and quirks of the Irishman, who, he admitted, notwithstanding his heresies, was a pleasant fellow in the main. And when, in addition to the flattery, a pipe had been insinuated by the officious Titus, at the precise moment when Small yearned for his afternoon's solace, but scrupled to ask for, or indulge in it—when the door had been made fast, and the first whiff exhaled, all his misgivings vanished, and he surrendered himself to the soft seduction. In this elysian state we find him.

"Ah! you may say that, Doctor Small," said he, in answer to some observation of the vicar, "that's a most original apophthegm. We all of us hould our lives by a thread. Och! many's the sudden finale I have seen. Many's the fine fellow's heels tripped up unawares, when least expected. Death hangs over our heads by a single hair, as your reverence says, precisely like the sword of Dan Maclise*, the flatterer of

* Query, Damocles?—*Printer's Devil.*

Dennis, what do you call him, ready to fall at a moment's notice, or at no notice at all—eh?—Mr. Coates. And that brings me back again to Sir Piers—poor gentleman—ah! we shan't soon see the like of him again."

"Poor Sir Piers!" said Mr. Coates, a wee man, with a brown bob, and a face red and round as an apple, and almost as small, "it is to be regretted, that his over conviviality should so much have hastened his lamented demise."

"Conviviality!" replied Titus; "no such thing—it was apoplexy—extravaseation of saarum."

"Extra vase-ation of rum and water, you mean," replied Coates, who, like all attorneys, rejoiced in a quibble.

"The squire's ailment," continued Titus, "was a sanguineous effusion, as we call it—positive determination of blood to the head, occasioned by a low way he got into just before his attack—a confirmed case of hypochondriasis, as that ould book Sir Piers was so fond of, denomi-

nates the blue devils; he neglected the bottle, which, in a man who has been a hard drinker all his life, is a bad sign. The lowering system never answers—never. Doctor, I'll just trouble you"—for Small, in a fit of absence, had omitted to pass the bottle, though not to help himself. "Had he stuck to *this*"—holding up a glass ruby bright—"the elixir vitæ—the grand panacea—he might have been hale and hearty at this present moment, and as well as any of us—but he wouldn't be advised. To my thinking, as that was the case, he'd have been all the better for a little of your Reverence's sperretual advice; and his conscience having been relieved, by confession, and absolution, he might have opened a fresh account, with an aisy heart and clane breast."

"I trust, Sir," said Small, withdrawing his pipe from his lips, "that Sir Piers Rookwood addressed himself to a higher source than to a sinning creature of clay like himself for mediation with his Creator for remission of his sins;

but were there any load of secret guilt that might have weighed heavy upon his conscience, it is to be regretted that he refused the last offices of the church, and died incommunicate. I was denied all admittance to his chamber."

"Exactly my case," said Mr. Coates; "I was refused entrance, though my business was of the utmost importance—certain dispositions—special bequests—for though the estate is entailed, yet still there are charges. You understand me—very strange to refuse to see me. Some people may regret it—may live to regret it, I say—that's all. I've just sent up a package to Lady Rookwood, which was not to be delivered till after Sir Piers's death. Odd circumstance that—been in my custody a long while. Some reason to think the squire meant to alter his will—ought to have seen *me*—sad neglect."

"More's the pity—but it was none of poor Sir Piers's doing!" replied Titus; "he had no will of his own, poor fellow, even on his death-

bed; it was all *her* doing, Lady Rookwood's," added he, in a whisper. "I, his medical adviser, and confidential friend, was ordered out of the room, and although I knew it was as much as his life was worth to leave him for a moment in that state, I was forced to comply; and, would you believe it, as I left the room, I heard high words. Yes, Doctor, as I hope to be saved, words of anger from her at that terrible time."

The latter part of this speech was uttered in a low tone, and very mysterious manner. The speakers drew so closely together, that the bowls of their pipes formed a common centre, whence the stems radiated. A momentary silence ensued, during which each man puffed for very life. Small next knocked the ashes from his tube, and began to replenish, coughing significantly. Mr. Coates expelled a thin, curling stream of vapour from a minute orifice in the corner of his almost invisible mouth, and raised his eyebrows, fraught with expectation: all seemed spell-

bound. On the strength of a bumper, which he swallowed, Titus mustered resolution to break the charm.

" Och, Sirs !" said he, in a cautious whisper, as if afraid lest the very walls should betray him, " Lady Rookwood's an awful woman—an awful woman—a fit mate for Bëelzebub himself, if he wer'nt a devilish deal too cunning to take a wife. I'll just tell you what happened. We all of us know the sort of life she led poor Sir Piers."

" Of a surety, do we," replied Small; " a most inauspicious union from the commencement.

Pronuba Tisiphone thalamis ululavit in illis,
Et cecinit mœstum devia carmen avis."

" I doubt, whether the symphony were promising," replied Titus: " the song itself was any thing but melodious. But, as I was saying, if there was no love lost between them during life, one would think the near approach of death might set all to rest: no such thing. When I came

back to the room, there lay the squire, in a sort of trance, and she glaring at him like a tigress —so savage—so full of spite and malice, and devilish rejoicing, my blood ran cold to witness it."

Small shook his head, muttering some monosyllabic interjection, that sounded very like an oath. Mr. Coates looked unutterable things, but said nothing, with the characteristic caution of his tribe.

"I approached the bed-side," resumed Titus, "as I don't care to confess, with fear and tripidation; for though the man does not live who can say Titus Tyrconnel dreads him, somehow or other there is that in her ladyship I never could get over—and which petrifies me like a stone. However, I went up to the bed, and took hould of the dying man's hand. Sinking as he was, the pressure roused him; whether or not he thought that his wife relented towards him, I can't say; a slight, sweet smile played upon his features—a faint motion was perceptible in his

lips; he tried to fix his gaze upon me, and when, through the gathering film, he perceived who it was, he shuddered sensibly, and his eyes filled with tears. Damme, but my own are blinded, now, to think of it. 'Sir Piers,' says I to him, 'be calm—be composed—'tis only I, Titus Tyrconnel.'—'I cannot be composed,' gasped he. 'I cannot die, unless I am at peace.'—'Give him laudanum,' said Lady Rookwood; 'here is the phial, it will abridge his sufferings.'—'Oh, no —no,' said Piers, with a look of horror I shall never forget, and struggling for utterance—'do not give me *that*—let me live, if only for a few moments.' And he sunk back senseless on the pillow, as I cast away the phial. I was soon roused from a moment's stupor I had been thrown into, by her ladyship, who apparently was not much pleased with my proceeding; indeed she tould me as much—but, frightened as I was at her, I could not help saying, I thought it was not like a Christian, to harbour hatred at such a moment; and that whatever difference there was betwixt them, she *ought* to be reconciled to her

husband, before reconciliation should be impossible. Och, Sirs! I wish you had seen her. She said not a word in reply, but slowly quitted the room, and returned not till after the Squire's departure. I should like to know, Dochtor, what stuff her heart is made of. Now I know what it is to hate and despise, and may be, when I'm roused, seeing that I'm an Irishman, I could knock out a man's brains with all the pleasure in life; but to see a fellow-creature expiring (which was not without a long and a terrible struggle, all occasioned by her conduct), before one's eyes, and not extend the hand of forgiveness to him—if so doing would ease the parting pang—'tis barbarous, unnatural, diabolical."

"Sir," said Doctor Small, with emphasis, laying down his pipe, "it's damnable—enough to draw down a judgment; such conduct can only be excused on the ground of insanity; the woman must be mad."

"I'll swear to it," interposed Titus, "she *is* mad."

"I shall think it my duty to advise young

Sir Ranulph to take out a writ *de lunatico inquirendo*," said the lawyer, his keen little eyes twinkling; "he would be glad, I'm sure, to have her out of the way."

"Ah! we've a beautiful way, in my country, of managing unruly women," said Titus; "we break 'em in young—take the vice out of 'em early. As to Lady Rookwood—"

"Can you inform me where she is?" inquired Small; "for I have heard nothing of her since my arrival?"

"Oh, faith," replied Titus, "fast shut up in her own room, where devil a body goes near her, barring her Abigail, ould Agnes, who's" (lowering his voice) "much of the same kidney as herself; and there she's been ever since poor Sir Piers's death. Bless your heart, I've not seen a glimpse of her, except to receive my instructions respecting the funeral.—Nothing would she have to do with it—every thing was left to me; and, but that dacency compels her, Sir Piers might bury himself, for any thing she'd care to the contrary."

"The law," said the attorney, "luckily would enforce that. The Rookwood family have always laid down laws for themselves respecting their interment. The custom of burial by torchlight, and at midnight, hath become a prescriptive obligation upon the house."

"And a grand custom it is, eh, Doctor?" said Titus, who could not resist his propensity to attack Small, "and one, I'm sure, that meets with your entire approbation. A funeral by torchlight must have an excellent impressive effect upon the pisantry hereabouts, who are all obliged to attend, just as they are at some magnificent burial in my own country. Oh! its a beautiful custom!"

"A superstitious custom, you should say," retorted Small, "and the sooner abolished the better. In darker ages, when Truth had not shed her light abroad, and men saw, as through a glass, darkly, such a ceremonial, conducted at such an hour, and in such a manner, might be consistent with the spirit of the creed professed by a sect, some of whose objects were to

keep its proselytes in darkness, and to produce a strong religious impression upon the minds of the ignorant herd who were its votaries. But was that impression truly favourable to virtue? —was it favourable to the pure, simple spirit of religion? Was not the attention rather awakened to the gloomy pageantry, the imposing parade, the shrouding mystery, the glare of the torch, the ghostly train—

De more vetusto
Funereas rapuere faces; lucet via longo
Ordine flammarum—

were these things not rather calculated to excite, to terrify, to act upon the imagination and the senses, rather than appeal to the heart and the reason, and to instil dread of punishment for vice, rather than inculcate a love of virtue?"

Such a speech, in Sir Piers's time, when quizzing the Doctor, for the Squire's amusement, was the order of the day, would have excited the risible faculties of Titus, and called forth his powers of ridicule. On the present occasion

he bestowed great applause upon the Doctor's powers of argument, maintaining an absurd gravity of countenance during his rejoinder.

"Ah! by my faith, Dochtor," said he, in reply, "that's able reasoning—most able reasoning; but for certain little scruples of conscience, I should, may be, be disposed to agree with you. You'll excuse my disputing the point, for the sake of conversation, though I'm not much of a cashuist, as you perceive—no great hand at settling a case of conscience. You grant that an impression is made, but deny that that impression is favourable to true religion: then comes the point upon which we don't all agree exactly —namely, what is the nature of true religion?— If it be one part of true religion, to have the fear of death constantly before our eyes, as an inducement to lead virtuous lives, then, shurely, the more forcibly it is presented the better, and the solemn shows of our church are highly efficacious. And allow me to say, Docthor, with deference, there are (I speak from my own

knowledge) thousands, ay, tens of thousands, among the poorer classes of my own countrymen, to whom no other religious appeal could be made, except through the medium of the senses; they must see as well as hear, to believe; and you might as well deny an Irishman his right to salvation at once, as his glorious prerogative of a funeral wake. Bury him like a dog, and he will not mind living like one. I know you will throw in my teeth, Docthor, the mummeries, as you call them—the candles, and incense, and confessions of my church; but what does that prove? nothing. With all its faults, the religion of my country is a fine one, and I'll uphould it. For myself; I must say, that I have seen more fervent devotion—more entire abstraction from the world—more prostration of spirit and self-abasement, in a Catholic country, than ever came under my observation in His Majesty's Protestant dominions."

"Sir," replied Small, with a sneer, "argument with you, if such are your opinions, were as

useless as absurd, nor shall I attempt it. Whatever has come under *your* observation, in this or in any other country, can very little affect the material part of the question. That there may be Catholics who are good Christians, I do not deny; I am charitable enough to hope so, and to believe so. That its professors are more fervent in their faith, more exact in its fulfilment, more active in the observance of the duties which it enjoins, is false—as false, as it is certain that intolerance, bigotry, and superstition, the blindest and the grossest, form the basis on which the Romish church rests for support. This burial by torchlight is a relic of papacy, as superstitious as the belief in death-omens indulged in by the same family, by whom that custom is continued."

"Ah! well," replied Titus, "I suppose I must give up the first point; but as to the death-presages, surely they're not to be denied. Didn't I see the fatal bough myself, and ould Peter Bradley, standing like a banshee, or death

fetch, beside it?—and didn't I hear what poor Sir Piers said afterwards? Says he, 'that bough bespakes my doom! As shure as ever I'm alive now, I shall be dead presently—that's the death-sign of our house—that tree is fatal to us—it never fails.' I could not help putting some faith in what he said, for there's an ould oak at Ballynacrag, that predicts ill luck much in the same way. May be you never heard the legend, Mr. Coates?"

"Never!" replied the attorney.

"Popular superstition," said Small "rejoiceth in such portents; yet is it a vain belief; and the vanity thereof is well rebuked by Webb, a county historian, who, commenting upon a similar fatality supposed to attend the ancient family of the Brereton of Brereton, in Cheshire, says, 'that Christian faith and religion teacheth the heirs of that and every other noble house, that, as they want not a prediction every day and hour that they live, to tell them that they shall die, so must they never look for such

a privilege as to have a messenger to tell them the certain time when it shall be.' With this sentiment I perfectly coincide. The Rookwoods are by no means singular in their superstition. According to tradition, the approaching fate of the head of the house of Brereton, to which I have just alluded, is announced by floating timber, which arises from the depths of a dark lake adjoining the mansion, described by Drayton in his Polyolbion, as—

—— that black, ominous mere,
Accounted one of these, that England's wonders are:
Of neighbours Black-mere named; of strangers Brereton's lake;
Whose property seems far from reason's way to stand;
For near before his death that's owner of the land
She sends up stocks of trees that on the top doe float;
By which the world her first did for a wonder note.

As to a tree being ominous of ill, that particular superstition is as old as Virgil's day, who, in one of his Eclogues, tells us—

Sæpe malum hoc nobis si mens non læva fuisset
De cœlo tactas memini prædicere quercus."

"That Latin bothers me entirely," replied Titus. "I know nothing about Virgil's logs—not I; but to return to the branch of which I was spaking—the sight of it broke Sir Piers's heart.—He returned to the house sad and sorrowful, but rallied his spirits a little towards dinner-time, when he dressed himself rather smarter than usual, for there was a party in the house; nevertheless, he had an odd look about him, as he came into the dining-room—a strange, unsettled look, as if all was not right. He sat down to dinner, and ate a mouthful or two, Jack Palmer doing the honours all the while—you've seen Jack, I dare say, Dochtor; a queer chap, whom the Squire picked up one day when hunting. Well, we all of us cracked our jests, and took our wine, striving to cheer him, but it wouldn't do—he didn't speak, but remained stock still, with his eyes staring steadfastly at some object, as it were, across the table. Just then, for I began to fear for his wits, I begged the favour of wine with him. This called him to

himself for a moment—he raised the glass to his lips, and then set it down, untouched, and began fixing his eyes again in that frightful way, and raising his hand, as if he would drive off some horrible object. I winked at the company, and no notice was taken. We went through the dinner, as well as we could—no more jests were uttered, and the wine seemed tasteless. When the cloth was removed, I prevailed on Sir Piers to retire to his own room. He got up stairs, and sat down. I then ventured to remonstrate with him upon his behaviour in that way before his guests, as thinking it might set stories in circulation to his prejudice. 'Not a word more,' said he, sternly; 'not a word of remonstrance. Who, think you, was in that room?'—'Who?' said I.—'One who is here,' said he, wildly, and renewing his gestures, 'and will not be sent hence. *I have been fighting with death for the last hour**.'—'Death!' said I.—'Pooh! pooh!

* Fact.

this is mere fancy'—though I felt I was telling him a lie all the while—he looked so ghastly ill. 'You will be better presently, after a little sleep.'—'No, no,' replied he; 'it is not fancy—I never shall be better—I shall never sleep again—never, till I sleep for ever. If I *can* sleep then—never—look there!' he cried, stretching out his arm. 'It is there again, trailing the bough after it—see the fatal bough—hark! how the leaves rustle, like a knell. See! it sweeps towards us—see!'—and he fell into a state of delirium, which endured the whole night."

"Alas! I fear poor Sir Piers was not so well prepared as he should have been, for his removal from this world," said Mr. Coates.

"I fear so, indeed," said the Doctor; "his seizure was sudden and severe. When the conscience is not altogether void of offence (though far be it from me to make this assertion in reference to Sir Piers), the approach of death is a dreadful contemplation—the change is fearful

to all—but, in that case, truly formidable and appalling.

> Heu quantum pœnæ misero mens conscia donat
> Quòd Styga, quòd Manes, infestaque Tartara somnis
> Videt!—

The furies have haunted the dreams of the conscience-stricken sinner—his sleep has been a foretaste of hell—and now the dreaded hour approaches—life is slipping away—there is no retracing his footsteps—no living again—no time allowed for repentance. *Die he must!* 'His flesh trembleth for fear of the Lord, and he is afraid of his judgments.' Time will not stay his chariot wheels—the sand runs out—his extremest moment is come—eternity is before him—eternity of torment.

> Æternitas, æternitas
> Versat coquitque pectus;
> Auget hæc pœnas indies,
> Centuplicatque flammas."

"That's a powerful picture, Dochtor," said

Titus, " so far as I can comprehend it, and a true representation, I'm grieved to say, of the last moments of poor Sir Piers. I have not tould you half the horror of that scene, nor can I describe it. His pangs were dreadful. There must have been something," continued Titus, again assuming a mysterious manner, and lowering the tone of his voice, " something frightful upon his mind—some—nay, there's no use mincing the matter with *you*—in a word, then, some *crime*, too deep to be divulged—or repented of."

" Crime!" exclaimed Coates and the Doctor, at one and the same time.

" Ay, crime!" repeated Titus, in the same under tone—" hush! not so loud, lest any one hear us. Poor fellow, he's dead now. I'm shure you both loved him as I did—and pity him, and pardon him, if he was guilty. Och! it was a terrible ending. Listen, and you shall hear. When Lady Rookwood had left the room, as I said before, what does Sir Piers do, but, ill as he

was, leaps straight out of bed, before I could prevent him, and, staggering to the door, locks it—yes, locks it, fast—and then cries out to me to help him. 'She shall not poison me,' said he: 'I *will* live out the brief remainder of my life—hell upon earth is more tolerable than hell to come.' With that I got him into bed—and he began to rave and shout—his delirium all coming back again. I knew death was not far off, then. One minute he was in the chase, cheering on the hounds. 'Halloo! tallyho!' cried he; 'who clears that fence?—who swims that stream?' The next, he was drinking, carousing, and hurraing, at the head of his table. 'Hip! hip! hip!'—as mad, and wild, and frantic, as ever he used to be, when wine had got the better of him. And then all of a sudden, in the midst of his shouting, he stopped, exclaiming, 'What, here again?—who let her in?—the door is fast—I locked it myself. Devil, why did you open it—you have betrayed me—she will poison me—and I cannot resist. Ha! another! Who—who is that?

—her face is white—her hair hangs about her shoulders—Is she alive again? Susan! Susan! why that look? You loved me well—too well. *You* will not drag me to perdition! *You* will not appear against me? No, no, no—it is not in your nature—you, whom I doated on, whom I loved —whom I——but I repented—I sorrowed—I prayed—*prayed!* Oh! oh! no prayers would avail. Pray for me, Susan—for ever. *Your* intercession may avail. It is not too late. I will do justice to all. Fetch me pen and ink—paper—I will confess—he shall have all. Where is my sister? I would speak with her—would tell her—tell her. Call Peter Bradley—I shall die before I can tell it. Come hither,' said he to me. 'There is a dark, dreadful secret on my mind—it must forth. Tell my sister—no, my senses swim—Susan is near me—fury is in her eyes—avenging fury—keep her off. What is this white mass in my arms? what do I hold? is it the corpse by my side, as it lay that long, long night? It is—it is. Cold, stiff, stirless

as then. White—horribly white—as when the moon, that would not set, showed all its ghastliness. Ah! it moves—it embraces me—it stifles—it suffocates me. Help! remove the pillow. I cannot breathe—I choke—oh!' The death rattle was in his throat—his eyes were fixed for ever!"

A profound silence succeeded Tyrconnel's narrative. Mr. Coates would not venture upon a remark. Doctor Small seemed, for some minutes, lost in painful reflection: at length he spoke. "You have described a shocking scene, Mr. Tyrconnel, and in a manner that convinces me of its fidelity; but I trust you will excuse me, as a friend of the late Sir Piers, in requesting you to maintain silence in future on the subject. Its repetition can be productive of no good, and may do infinite harm, by giving currency to unpleasant reports, and harrowing the feelings of the survivors. Every one, acquainted with Sir Piers's history, must be aware, as I dare say you are already, of an occurrence, which cast a

shade over his early life, blighted his character, and endangered his personal safety. It was a dreadful accusation—but I believe, nay, I am sure, unfounded. Erring, Sir Piers was undoubtedly; but I trust he was more weak than sinful. I have reason to think he was the tool of others. He is now gone, and with him let us bury his offences, and the remembrance of them. That his soul was heavily laden, would appear from your account of his last moments; yet I fervently trust that his repentance was sincere, in which case, there is hope of mercy for him. 'At what time soever a sinner shall repent him of his sins, from the bottom of his heart, I will blot out all his wickedness out of his remembrance, saith the Lord.' God's mercy is greater than man's sins—and there is hope of salvation for Sir Piers."

"I trust so, indeed," said Titus; "and as to repating a syllable of what I have just said, devil a word more will I utter on the subject. My lips shall be shut, and sealed, as close as

one of Mr. Coates's bonds, for ever, hereafter: but I thought it just right to make you acquainted with the particulars. And now, having dismissed the bad for ever, I am ready to spake of Sir Piers's good qualities, and not few they were. What was there, becoming a gentleman, that he couldn't do, I'd like to know? Couldn't he hunt as well as ever a one in the county? and hadn't he as good a pack of hounds? Couldn't he shoot as well, and fish as well, and drink as well, or better? only he couldn't carry his wine, which was his misfortune, not his fault. And wasn't he always ready to ask a friend to dinner with him? And didn't he give him a good dinner, when he came, barring the cross-cups afterwards? And hadn't he every thing agreeable about him, except his wife, which was a great drawback? And with all his peculiarities and humours, wasn't he as kind hearted a man as needs be? and an Irishman at the core? And so, if he wern't dead, I'd say long life to him; but as he is, here's peace to his memory."

At this crisis of the conversation, a knocking was heard at the door, which some one without had vainly tried to open.

Titus rose to unclose it, ushering in the individual designated as Jack Palmer.

CHAPTER VIII.

Mrs. Peachum.—Sure the Captain's the finest gentleman on the road.

BEGGAR'S OPERA.

JACK PALMER was a good-humoured, good-looking man, with immense, bushy, reddish coloured whiskers, a freckled, florid complexion, sandy hair, rather inclined to scantiness towards the scalp of the head, and garnishing the nape of his neck with a ruff of crisp little curls, like the ring on a monk's shaven crown. Notwithstanding this tendency to baldness, Jack could not be more than thirty, though his looks were some five years in advance. His face was one of those inexplicable countenances, that seem proper to a peculiar class of men—a regular Newmarket physiognomy—compounded chiefly of cunning and assurance—not low cunning, nor

vulgar assurance, but crafty sporting subtlety, careless as to results—indifferent to obstacles—ever on the alert for the main chance—game and turf all over—eager, yet easy—keen, yet quiet. He was somewhat showily dressed, in such mode that he looked half like a fine gentleman of that day, half like a jockey of our's—his nether man appeared in well-fitting, well-worn buckskins, and boots with tops, not unconscious of the saddle; while the airy extravagance of his sky-blue riding coat, the richness of his vest, the pockets whereof were beautifully exuberant, according to the fashion of the period; the smart luxuriance of his shirt-frill of the finest cambric, and a certain curious taste in the size and style of his buttons, proclaimed that, in his own esteem at least, his person did not appear altogether unworthy of adornment: nor, in justice to Jack, must we say he was in error. He was a model of a man for five feet ten; square, compact, capitally

built in every particular, excepting that his legs were the slightest bit embowed, which defect probably arose from his being almost constantly on horseback—a sort of exercise in which Jack greatly delighted, and was accounted a superb rider. It was, indeed, his daring horsemanship, upon one particular occasion, when he had outstripped a whole field, that had procured him the honour of an invitation to Rookwood. Who he was, or whence he came, was a question not easily answered—Jack, himself, evading all solution to the inquiry. Sir Piers never troubled his head about the matter: he was a "d——d good fellow—rode devilish well;" that was enough for him. Nobody else knew any thing about him, save that he was a capital judge of horse-flesh, kept a famous black mare, and attended every hunt in the county—that he could sing a good song, was a choice companion, and could drink three bottles without feeling the worse for them.

Sensible of the indecorum that might attach

to his appearance, Doctor Small had hastily laid down his pipe, and arranged his wig; but when he saw who was the intruder, with a grunt of defiance, he resumed his occupation, without returning the bow of the latter, or bestowing further notice upon him. Nothing discomposed at the churchman's displeasure, the new comer greeted Titus cordially, and carelessly saluting Mr. Coates, threw himself into a chair. He next filled a tumbler of claret, which he drained at a draught.

"Have you ridden far, Jack?" asked Titus, noticing the dusty state of Palmer's azure attire.

"Some dozen miles," replied Palmer; "and that, on such an afternoon as the present, makes one feel thirstyish. I'm as dry as a sand-bed. Famous wine this—beautiful tipple—better than all your red fustian. Ah, how the old squire used to tuck it in! Well, that's all over—a glass like this might do him good where he's gone to! I'm afraid I'm intruding; but the fact is, I wanted a little information about the order of

the funeral, and missing you below, came hither in search of you. You're to be chief mourner, I suppose—rehearsing your part, eh?"

"Come come, Jack, no joking; the subject's too serious. I am to be chief mourner—and I expect you to be a mourner—and every body else to be mourners. We must all mourn at the proper time—there'll be a power of people at the church."

"There *are* a power of people here already," returned Jack, "if they all attend."

"And they all *will* attend—or what is the aiting and drinking to go for? I sha'n't leave a sowl in the house."

"Excepting one," said Jack, slily. "*She* won't attend, I think."

"Ay, excepting one—she and her maid—all the rest go with me, and form part of the procession—you go too."

"Of course—what time do you start?"

"Twelve, precisely. As the clock strikes, we set out—all in a line, and a long line we'll be.

I'm waiting for that ould coffin-faced rascal, Peter Bradley, to arrange the order."

"How long will it all occupy, think you?" asked Jack.

"That I can't say," returned Titus; "possibly an hour, more or less—but we shall start to the minute—that is, if we can get all together, so don't be out of the way. And hark ye, Jack, you must contrive to change your toggery—that coat won't do."

"Never fear that," replied Palmer, "but who were those in the carriages?"

"Is it the last carriage you mane?—they're squire Forester and his sons—they're dining with the other gentlefolk, in the great room up stairs, to be out of the way. Oh, we'll have a grand berrin, never fear—and, by the powers, I must be looking after it."

"Stay a minute," said Jack, "let's have a cool bottle first; they're all taking care of themselves below, and Peter Bradley has not made

his appearance, so you need be in no hurry. I'll go with you presently—shall I ring for the claret?"

"By all manes," replied Titus.

Jack accordingly arose, and a butler answering the summons, the wine was ordered, and brought.

"You heard of the affray, last night, I suppose?" said Jack, renewing the conversation.

"With the poachers?—to be sure I did.—Wasn't I called in to examine Hugh Badger's wownds, the first thing this morning—and a deep cut there was, just over the eye, besides other bruises."

"Is the wound dangerous?" inquired Palmer.

"Not exactly mortal, if you mean that," replied the Irishman; "dangerous, certainly."

"Humph!" exclaimed Jack, "they'd a pretty hardish bout of it, I understand. Any thing been heard of the body?"

"What body?" inquired Small, who was half dozing.

"The body of the drowned poacher," replied Jack; "they were off to search for it this morning."

"Found the body!" exclaimed Titus, "Ha, ha!—I can't help laughing, for the life and sowl of me—a capital trick he played 'em—capital—ha, ha! What do you think the fellow did?—Ha, ha!—after leading 'em the devil's dance, all round the park, killing a hound as savage as a wolf, and breaking Hugh Badger's head, which is as hard and thick as a butcher's block, what does the fellow do but dive into a pool, with a great rock hanging over it, and make his way to the other side, through a subterranean pass, which nobody knew any thing about, till they came to drag for the body, thinking him snugly drowned all the while—ha, ha!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" chorused Jack; "Bravo, he's a lad of the right sort—a rum cove. Ha, ha!"

"He! who?" inquired the attorney.

"Why, the poacher, to be sure," replied Jack; "who else were we talking about?"

"Beg pardon," returned Coates; "only thought you might have heard some intelligence. We've got an eye upon him—we know who it was."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Jack, "and who was it?"

"An individual, known by the name of Luke Bradley."

"The devil!" cried Titus, "you don't say it was he?—Murder in Irish! that bates every thing—why he was Sir Piers's ——"

"Natural son," replied the attorney; "he has not been heard of for some time—shocking incorrigible rascal—impossible to do any thing with him."

"Ah, indeed!" said Jack; "I've heard Sir Piers speak of the lad—and, by his account, he's as fine a fellow as ever crossed colt's back—only a little wildish and unreasonable, as the best of us may be—wants breaking, that's all—your

wildest colt ever makes the best horse, and so would he. To speak the truth, I'm glad he escaped."

"So am I," rejoined Titus; "for, in the first place, I've a foolish partiality for poachers, and am sorry when any of 'em come to hurt; and, in the second, I'd be mightily displeased if any ill had happened to one of Sir Piers's flesh and blood, as this young chap appears to be.

"Appears to be!" repeated Palmer; "there's no *appearing* in the case, I take it. This Bradley's an undoubted off-shot of the old squire. His mother was a servant-maid at the Hall, I rather think; you, Sir, perhaps, can inform us."

"She was something better than a mere servant," replied the Attorney. "I remember her quite well, though I was but a boy then—a lovely creature, and so taking, I don't wonder at Sir Piers's fancy being smitten with her. He was mad after the women in those days, and

pretty Sue Bradley, above all others. She lived with him quite like his lady."

"So I've heard," returned Jack. "She lived with him till her death; and, let me see, wasn't there something rather odd in the way in which she died, rather suddenish and unexpected—a noise made about it at the time, eh?"

"Not that I ever heard," replied Coates, shaking his head, and seemingly afflicted with an instantaneous ignorance; while Titus affected not to hear the remark, but occupied himself with his wine-glass. The vicar snored audibly. "I was too young, then, to pay any attention to idle rumours," continued Coates. "It's a long time ago. May I ask the reason of your inquiry?"

"Nothing farther than simple curiosity," replied Jack, enjoying the consternation of his companions. "It is, as you say, a long while since; but it's singular, how that sort of thing is remembered. One would think the people had something else to do than talk of one's

private affairs for ever: for my part, I despise such tattle; but there *are* persons in the neighbourhood, who still say it was an awkward business. Amongst others, I've heard that this very Luke Bradley talks in pretty plain terms about it."

"Does he, indeed!" said Mr. Coates. "So much the worse for him, that's all. Let me once lay hands upon him, and I'll warrant me I'll put a gag in his mouth, shall spoil his talking in future."

"That's precisely the point I want you to arrive at," replied Jack; "and I advise you by all means to accomplish that, for the sake of the family. Nobody likes his friends to be talked about; so I'd settle the matter amicably, were I you. Just let the fellow go his way, he won't return here again, in a hurry, I'll be bound; as to clapping him in quod, he might prattle—might turn stag."

"Turn stag!" replied Coates, "what the deuce is that? in my opinion, he has "turned stag"

already; at all events, he'll pay *deer* for his night's sport, you may depend upon it. What does it signify what he says? Let me lay hands upon him, that's all."

"Well, well," said Jack, "no offence; I meant but to offer a suggestion. I thought the family, young Sir Ranulph, I mean, mightn't like the story to be revived; as to Lady Rookwood, she don't, I suppose, care much about these things; indeed, if I've been rightly informed, she bears this youngster no particular good-will, to begin with, and has tried hard to get him out of the country; but, as you say, what does it signify what he says, he can *only* talk; Sir Piers is dead and gone."

"Humph!" muttered Coates.

"But it does seem a little hardish, that a lad should swing for killing a bit of venison in his own father's park."

"Which he'd a *nat'ral* right to do," cried Titus.

"He'd no natural right to bruise, violently

assault, and endanger the life of his father's, or any body else's, gamekeeper. I tell you, Sir, he's committed a capital offence, and if he's taken——"

"No chance of that, I hope," interrupted Jack.

"That's a wish I can't help wishing myself," said Titus; "these poachers are fine boys, when all's said and done."

"The finest of all boys," exclaimed Jack, with a sort of enthusiasm, communicated, perhaps, by his love of any thing connected with sport, "are those birds of the night, and men of the moon, whom we call, most unjustly, poachers. They are, after all, only *professional sportsmen*, making a business of what we make a pleasure; a nightly pursuit of what is to us a daily relaxation; there's the main distinction. As to the rest, it's all in idea; they merely thin an overstocked park, as *you* would reduce a plethoric patient, Doctor; or as *you* would work a monied client, if you got him into chancery, Mister

Attorney. And then how much more scientifically and systematically they set to work, than we amateurs do; how noiselessly they bag a hare, smoke a pheasant, or knock a buck down with an air-gun; how independent are they of any licence, except that of a good eye and a swift pair of legs; how unnecessary for them to ask permission to Mr. So and So's grounds, or my Lord That's preserves; they are free of every cover, and indifferent to any alteration in the Game Laws. I've some thoughts, when every thing else fails, of taking to poaching myself. In my opinion, a poacher's a highly respectable character. What say you, Mr. Coates?"—turning very gravely to that gentleman.

"Respectable character!" echoed Coates; "such a question scarce deserves a serious answer. Perhaps you will next maintain that a highwayman is a gentleman."

"Most undoubtedly," replied Palmer, in the same grave tone, which might have passed for

banter, had Jack ever bantered; "I'll maintain and prove it. I don't see how he can be otherwise. It is as necessary for a man to be a gentleman before he can turn highwayman, as it is for a doctor to have his diploma, or an attorney his certificate. Some of the finest gentlemen of their day, as Captains Lovelace, Hind, Hannum, and Dudley, were eminent on the road, and they set the fashion. Ever since their day, a real highwayman would consider himself disgraced, if he did not conduct himself in every way like a gentleman. Of course, there are pretenders in this line, as in every thing else; but these are only exceptions, and prove the rule. What are the distinguishing characteristics of a fine gentleman? perfect knowledge of the world—perfect independence of character—*éclat* in society—command of cash—and inordinate success with the women—you grant all these premises; first, then, it is part of a highwayman's business to be thoroughly acquainted with the world—he is the easiest and pleasantest fellow going.

Then whose inclinations are so uncontrolled as the highwayman's, so long as the mopuses last? who produces so great an effect by so few words? —'Stand, and deliver,' is sure to arrest attention—every one is struck by an address like that. As to money, he takes a purse of a hundred guineas as easily as you would the same sum from the faro table. And wherein lies the difference? only in the name of the game—both are a species of hazard. Who so little need of a banker, as he? all he has to apprehend, is a check—all he draws, is a trigger. As to the women, they doat upon him—not even your red-coated soldier is so successful. Look at a highwayman mounted on his flying steed, with his pistols in his holsters, and his cutlass by his side —what can be a more gallant sight? the clatter of his horse's heels is like music to his ear—he is in full quest—he shouts to the fugitive horseman to stay—the other flies all the faster—what hunt can be half so exciting as that? Suppose he overtakes his prey, which ten to one

he will, how readily his summons to deliver is attended to—how satisfactory is the appropriation of a lusty purse or corpulent pocket-book—getting the brush is nothing to it. How tranquilly he departs, takes off his hat to his accommodating acquaintance, wishes him a pleasant journey, and disappears across the heath. England, Sir, has reason to be proud of her highwaymen; they are peculiar to her clime, and are as much before the cut-throat brigand of Italy—the assassin contrabandist of Spain, or the dastard cut-purse of France, as her sailors are before all the rest of the world. The day will never come, I hope, when we shall degenerate into the footpad, and lose our *night errantry!* Even the French borrow from us—they have only one highwayman of eminence, and he learnt and practised his art in England."

"And who was he, may I ask?" said Coates.

"Claude Du Val," replied Jack; "and, though a Frenchman, he was a deuced fine fellow in his day—quite a tip top maccaroni—he could skip

and twirl like a figurant, warble like an opera singer, and play the flageolet better than any man of his day—he always carried a pipe in his pocket, along with his snappers. And then his dress—it was quite beautiful to see how smartly he was rigg'd out, all velvet and lace; and even with his vizard on his face, the ladies used to cry out to see him. Then he took a purse with the air and grace of a Receiver-General—all the women adored him—and that, bless their pretty faces, was the best proof of his gentility—I wish he'd not been a Mounseer. The women never mistake—*they* can always discover the true gentleman—and they were all, of every degree, from the countess to the kitchen-maid, over head and ears in love with him."

"But he was taken, I suppose?" said Coates. "Ay," responded Jack; "the women were his undoing, as they've been many brave fellow's before, and will be again." Touched by which reflection, Jack became, for once in his life, sentimental, and sighed. "Poor Du Val! he

was seized at the Hole in the Wall, in Chandos Street, by the bailiff of Westminster, when dead drunk; his liquor having been drugg'd by his dells, who were in the bailiff's pay; and his three pops, that never missed their mark, and his tried toledo, were taken from him; which, when he perceived, on returning to his senses, he told the bailiff, with an oath, he had done well to remove, as he would have been cut to mince meat before they should have taken him—and with that he gave a leap, heavily ironed as he was, that frightened every body in the room. And then, just to show you the row the women made about him; when he was lying in Newgate, they all came in a flock, some of the best of 'em masked, that they might not be known*, to

* The Author of Du Val's Memoirs (published 1670) affects to take the conduct of his countrywomen, upon this afflicting occasion, in high dudgeon. "A catalogue of their names," saith he, "I have by me; nay, even of those who, when they visited him, durst not pull off their vizards, for fear of showing their eyes swoln, and their cheeks blubbered with tears! When I first put pen to paper, I was in great indignation, and fully resolved, nay, and I think I swore, that I would print this muster-roll. But,

console him, and make intercession for his pardon;—and when that would not do, they followed him in mourning coaches to the Tyburn tree—where, having died, as he had lived, like a hero, after he had hanged a convenient time, his body was cut down, and conveyed to the Tangiers Tavern, in St. Giles's, where it lay in state all night, the room hung with black cloth, as his memoirs tell us; and the hearse covered with scutcheons; eight wax tapers burning, and as many tall gentlemen, with long black cloaks, attending. If that ain't gentlemanlike, I've done."

"It's noble," exclaimed Titus, "almost as grand as Sir Piers's funeral,—and, talking of that, by the bye, I mustn't stay here much longer."

"It was a thousand pities," said Mr. Coates,

upon second thoughts, and calmer considerations, I have altered my fierce resolution, partly because I would not do my nation so great a disgrace; and, especially that part of it, to whom I am so entirely devoted. But principally, because I hoped a milder physic might cure them of this French mania—of this inordinate appetite to mushrooms—of this dangerous doating upon strangers."

with a sneer, "that so fine a gentleman should come to so base an end."

"A thousand pities," returned Jack. "The author of his Life exclaims,—'Who is there worthy of the name of man, that would not prefer such a death, before a mean, solitary, inglorious life?' His epitaph, which you may see in the middle aisle of the church at Covent Garden, as well as the Du Val arms engraved on the marble flag, speaks volumes—

Here lies Du Val—Reader, if male thou art,
Look to thy purse—if female, to thy heart;
The second conqueror of the Norman race,
Knights to his arms did yield, dames to his face;
Old Tyburn's glory—England's peerless thief—
Du Val, the ladies' joy—Du Val, the ladies' grief!

"Pish," sneered Coates.

"Very fine, indeed," cried Titus; "but your English robbers are nothing at all, compared with our Tories* and Rapparees—nothing at

* The word Tory, as here applied, must not be confounded with the term of party distinction now in general use in the political world. It simply means a thief on a grand scale,

all—they were the raal gentlemen—they were the boys to cut a throat asily."

"Cut a throat! pshaw!" said Jack, in disgust, "the gentleman I speak of never maltreated any one, except in self-defence."

"May be not," replied Titus; "I'll not dispute the pint—but these Rapparees were true brothers of the blade, and gentlemen every inch. There was Redmond O'Hanlon, as great a man in his way as your famous outlaw Robin Hood, that we read of in the ballats—a generous robber, taking from the rich and giving to the poor, and that's the kind of thief that I like. I never read of Robin and Little John, and Maid Marian, without my heart throbbing within my bosom, and the blood dancing in my veins, to be in the green-wood along with them. Just such another as bold Robin Hood was Redmond O'Hanlon. Och, many's the notable feat that he

something more than "a snapper up of unconsidered trifles," or petty larceny rascal. We have classical authority for this —"TORY—an advocate for absolute monarchy, *also an Irish vagabond, robber, or rapparee.*"—GROSE'S DICTIONARY.

performed. I'll just tell you one story that's tould about him, just to show the daring audacity of the fellow. But in the meanwhile don't let's forget the bottle—talking's dry work—here's our absent friends!" winking at the somnolent Small.

"Well, you must know," continued Titus, "that Redmond had arrived at such an elevation, the Tories being in power then, and his having charge of the Administration, being a sort of First Lord of the Treasury, that he elected himself Captain-General of all the Rapparees, and would allow no one to take a purse, or make free with a pocket-book, without a special permission from himself, which shows he had instinctive sense of his political importance. One day, as the great Captain was riding quietly along the road between Newry and Armagh, he chanced to fall in with a pedlar, who was making as much hullabaloo and lamen'ation, as if he'd been knocked off the civil list. 'Hello, my man,' says Captain O'Hanlon, 'what ails you,

what makes you cry out in that way?'—'Oh,' answers the pedlar, 'I'm kilt entirely. I've been robbed of above five pounds in kinnis, which was all I had, as I hope for salvation; and that wouldn't satisfy the blackguard neither, for he took away my pack; and because I strove to hould it, he knock'd me down, and kick'd me worse than a hound.'—'And who was it robb'd you?' ask'd the Captain. 'That infernal rascal, and thief of the world, Redmond O'Hanlon,' answered the pedlar. 'You dog,' cried Redmond, in a terrible passion, delivering him at the same time a knock on the side of the head with his whip-handle, 'how dare you tell me a lie like that, to my face? By the mother that bore me, I've half a mind to shoot you on the spot, and but for settling this business I'd do it. *I* am Redmond O'Hanlon; nobody shall usurp my title with impunity. Show me which way the fellow went, and I'll soon convince you what it is to offend a Tory leader.' The pedlar pointed out the road, upon which he whistled

the members of his cabinet, who were a little in the rear, and they set off in pursuit. The fellow was soon overtaken, with the pack on his back, and Redmond immediately compelled a restitution of the property. 'And now, my friend,' said he, to the terrified robber, 'as I don't remember having given you any authority to make use of my name, or indeed any licence for exaction at all, I shall think it my duty to make an example of you. You, pedlar, will sign an obligation to prosecute this fellow next assizes, on pain of having both your ears cropp'd off—a penalty which, if you neglect the bond, I will not fail to enforce. You, Sir, I shall merely commit to gaol.' And he forthwith drew up a mittimus from himself, Redmond O'Hanlon, *in loco*, one of His Majesty's Justices of the Peace, as follows:—'I herewith send you the body of Dennis O'Brien, who was this day brought before me and examined, for robbing Patrick O'Driscol on the King's high road, requiring you to hold him in safe custody till

the next General Assize to be held for the County; and for so doing this shall be your sufficient warrant.' And this he signed with his own hand, and sent him off with some of his own troop to the gaol at Armagh."

"Bravissimo!" cried Palmer, "and was the fellow tried?"

"Yes, and convicted moreover," replied Titus, "and plenty of fun there was in court, as you may suppose, amongst the big *Whigs*, at this daring proceeding of the great Tory."

"The Whigs were in power at last, I suspect?" said Coates. "Was the great Captain still more exalted?"

"As high as Haman," answered Titus; "more's the pity—I'm no enemy to the Tories, and regret the great Captain."

"So do I," said Jack, who had listened with great satisfaction to the exploit. "Suppose we toast him—To the memory of Captain O'Hanlon"—filling his glass.

"I must take the liberty of refusing that

toast," said the Attorney; "it shall never be said that I, a Clerk of the Peace——"

"Tush, man," said Jack, "sit down, and keep quiet; we know you're amongst the *Opposition*—drink *what* you like, and *as* you like, only let's have another story, if Titus have any more to tell. He tops the traveller in prime twig."

"Here's to the blessed memory of Redmond O'Hanlon," cried Titus, draining a bumper. "And as to the story, did you ever hear mention made of one Captain Power. He was another brave boy, and quite the gentleman, and as fond of the girls as ever was Du Val. Nicely he turned the tables on an ensign of musquetteers, that came out from Cork to seize him. You shall hear how it happened.

"This ensign had received intelligence that Power had taken up his quarters at a small inn, on the road leading from Kilworth, and being anxious to finger the reward offered for his apprehension, set out with a file of men. It was growing dusk when they reached the inn,

and there, shure enough, was Power drinking, for they saw him through a window, with his bottle before him, lighting his pipe, quite comfortable. 'Ha—ha'—thinks the Ensign, 'my boy, I have you safe enough, now; but knowing his man, and expecting a devil of a resistance, if he attempted to lay hands on the Captain by force, he determined to resort to stratagem; so entering the house, just as if he were on a recruiting party, he, the Ensign, calls loudly for whiskey for his men, and a bottle of port for himself, and marches into the room where Power was sitting, who got up to receive him very politely. Now, whether the Captain suspected his intentions or not I can't say; at all events, he didn't let the Ensign perceive it; but took his wine as pleasantly as we are doing now, with no suspicion of any thing in our heads—and no thought of any mischief brewing."

"Exactly," said Jack; "I understand."

"Well, the bottle was drawing to a close, and Power rose up, to call for another, when the

Ensign, thinking it time, starts to his feet, presents a pistol to his head, and commands him to surrender. 'With all the pleasure in life,' replied the Captain, 'that is, when you can take me; and knocking up the Ensign's arm, so that he could not even pull his trigger, he threw himself upon him, effectually preventing his crying out, by stuffing his coat-pocket into his mouth; he then very coolly proceeded to divest the Ensign of his grand uniform, and taking his purse and sword, and military cloak, tied him hand and foot, and telling him he hoped he was satisfied with his *reward*, walked out of the room, locking the door on the other side unconcernedly after him, and putting the key in his pocket. The men, who were busy with their whiskey toddy, seeing their officer, as they thought, come out and motion them to keep still, never stirred a peg—but suffered Power to get clear away, without so much as a question."

"Capital," cried Jack.

"Ah," said Titus, "many's the tale I could

tell, if I'd time, about these Rapparees. There *was* strong Jack Macpherson, who could pull a man off his horse single-handed, and Billy Macguire, Irish Teague, as he was called, and Dick Balf, and the devil knows how many others; and there is Paul Liddy, whose name's quite up in the country now—a famous thief, horse-stealer, and horse-charmer."

"Horse-charmer!" repeated Palmer, "what sort of craft may that be?"

"I'll tell you," replied Titus; "Cahir na Cappul, one of the Rapparees, is said to have received a potent charm from a witch, to enable him to decoy and entrap any horse he thought proper; and a right serviceable piece of enchantment he found it, though not quite so useful to a Rapparee as that of Billy Delaney, who got the same ould woman to rub his neck with an intment, so that no hemp could hang him, which last has proved true, sure enough; for after he'd been tied up for a matter of an hour, and cut down, he was brought to life again without

difficulty*. But to return to Cahir na Cappul. I was once myself an eye-witness to his tricks, although I wasn't aware it was he himself at the time. One evening I'd been to see a friend in a distant part of the country, and was returning by some fields skirting a great boggy piece of ground that lies in those parts, when what should I see but a man driving a pack of horses into a corner of the field, which he managed so cleverly that I stopped to look at him. Not a notion had I that he was a

* Delaney's own account somewhat differs from that in the text; he does not appear to attribute his preservation to any thing like witchcraft. "An acquaintance of mine," says he, "who had been instructed in the art of surgery at Paris, came to see me in gaol a few days before my trial at Naas; he prepared something for me, which I was to keep in my mouth while I hung, if possible, and said it would be a means of preserving my life. This made me somewhat careless of preparing for death, for I was intent upon observing his directions. I turned from the ladder as easily as I could, and for the space of a minute or two was very sensible of pain, and could feel something now and then under my feet, till immediately I thought all things before me were turned into a red flame, which presently seemed blue, till at last it vanished quite."—*History of the Rapparees.*

Rapparee; in fact, I took him for the owner of the field. As to the horses, they were young unbroken things, as wild and as restive as could be; but somehow or other, by screaming and shouting, he got 'em all into a corner. Then singling out the finest and freshest (and a beauty it was to be shure), he seized him by the near fore leg, and held him fast while he threw a bit of rope round his neck, vaulting on to his back as if he'd been a tame pony in a circus. Thinks I to myself, when I saw how the coult began to fling,—You'll not be sorry to change your seat, my friend. No such idea entered his head; for however much the coult kicked, and capered, and rared, there sat the man, and only laughed, and encouraged him. At last the horse rared boult upright, with his legs in the air; but still there the rider stuck, glued to his back, as if he'd been the man half of the Centaur in the sign at Ballynacrag. Finding resistance useless, and the position by no means agreeable, down came the coult, and with that my gentleman

began to tickle his sides with his fingers, and away they set dashing and splashing over bog and quagmire—floundering and plunging—so that I thought if the Headless Horseman himself had been the rider, he must have been hard put to it. I was wrong again, for they were soon out of sight; and I found, on inquiry, afterwards, that it was no other than Cahir na Cappul himself."

"Is that all the charm?" cried Jack. "The secret of that, Mr. Tyrconnel, lies in a nutshell—*pluck*—that's all that's required. I'll engage to do the same thing any day in the year, and ask no witchcraft to aid me to keep my seat."

"Cahir can do other things beside ride," said Titus, solicitous for the glory of his country. "Not long since he'd a narrow escape of being taken on the banks of the Barrow, when he was pursued by a large party of armed men on both sides of the river. Down rushed Cahir to the water side, and dash'd headlong into the stream, swimming away for his life. A gun

was fired—down he dives, like a coot—up again —another—and then a volley, followed by a long dive—so long, that every body thought he was done for entirely—when up pops a black head, far down the stream. He was now in a swift current, and put out all his strength, darting away like an arrow from a bow. The water in every direction was spotted by balls, but never a one seems to touch him; and though every sowl of 'em ran as fast as legs can carry him, yet, aided by the swift stream, Cahir na Cappul outstripped them all."

"Well," said Coates, "we've had enough about the Irish highwaymen, in all conscience; but there's one on our own side of the channel, that makes quite as much noise."

"Who's that?" asked Jack.

"Dick Turpin," replied the Attorney; "he seems to me quite as worthy of mention as any of the Hinds, the Du Vals, or the Rapparees, you have either of you enumerated."

"I did not think of him," replied Palmer,

smiling; "though if I had, he scarcely deserves to be ranked with those great men."

"Turpin!" cried Titus; "they tell me he keeps the best nag in the United Kingdom, and can ride faster and farther in a day than any other man."

"So I've heard," said Palmer; "I should like to try a run with him. I warrant me, I'd not be far behind him."

"I should like to get a peep at him," quoth Titus.

"So should I," rejoined Coates.

"You may both of you be gratified, gentlemen," said Palmer. "Talking of Dick Turpin, they say, is like talking of the devil, he's at your elbow ere the word's out of your mouth. He may be within hearing, at this moment, for any thing we know to the contrary."

"Faith, then," replied Titus, "he must lie, like a rat, in the wainscot, for I don't know where else he could hide."

"Were he there," returned Jack, laughing,

"you might grab him, like Du Val at the '*Hole-in-the-Wall*.'"

"I wish they could grab him, with all my heart," said the Attorney; "and they might do so, if they were to set the right way to work. I've a plan for seizing him, that could not fail; I've a noose in embryo: only let me get a glimpse of him, that's all. You shall see how I'll dispose of him."

"Well, Sir, we *shall* see," observed Palmer; "and, for your own sake, I wish you may never be nearer to him than you are at this moment. With his friends, they say Dick Turpin can be as gentle as a lamb; with his foes, especially with a limb of the law like yourself, he's been found but an ugly customer. I once saw him at Newmarket, where he was collared by two constable culls, one on each side. Shaking off one, and dealing the other a blow in the face with his heavy-handled whip, he stuck spurs into his horse, and though the whole field gave chace, he distanced them all, easily."

"And how came you not to try your pace with him, if you were there, as you boasted just now?" asked Coates.

"So I did, and stuck closer to him than any one else. We were neck and neck. I was the only person who could have delivered him to the hands of justice, if I'd felt inclined."

"I wish I'd a similar opportunity," said Coates; "it should be neck or nothing. Either he or I should reach the scragging post first. I'd take him, dead or alive."

"*You* take him!" cried Jack, with a sneer.

"I'd engage to do it," replied Coates. "I'll bet you a hundred guineas I take him, if I ever have the same chance."

"Done!" exclaimed Jack, rapping the table at the same time, so that the glasses danced upon it.

"That's right," cried Titus. "I'll go your halves."

"What's the matter?" exclaimed Small, awakened from his doze.

"Only a trifling bet, about a highwayman," replied Titus.

"A highwayman!" echoed Small. "There are none in the house, I hope."

"I hope not," answered Coates. "But these gentlemen seem to have a remarkable predilection to discussing the lives of those depredators. They have sung the praises of all sorts of rogues and rascals for the last half-hour. All the thieves of modern days have been brought in review."

"Pshaw," returned Small, "what are the thieves of modern days to those of old? Thieving is not a thing of yesterday. The very gods, of antiquity, themselves indulged in its practice. Lucian relates, in the dialogue of Apollo and Vulcan, that Mercury was the finest cutpurse that ever existed—the hammer of Vulcan, the girdle of Venus, the cattle of Admetus, the sceptre of Jupiter—nothing human or divine escaped him. Hence he was celebrated by Homer, in his hymn to that Deity, as the Αρκον φιλητεον—

the prince of robbers. Autolycus, his son, inherited his father's art—his ingenuity was boundless, his skill infinite—

> Nascitur Autolycus furtum ingeniosus ad omne,
> Qui facere assuerat, patriæ non degener artis,
> Candida de nigris, et de candentibus atra.

in vulgar parlance, he was 'up to every thing'—no one escaped his artifices—he tricked all men, before their own eyes."

Further speech was cut short, by the sudden opening of the door, followed by the abrupt entrance of a tall, slender young man, who hastily advanced towards the table, around which the company were seated. He excited the utmost astonishment in the whole group: curiosity was exhibited in every countenance—the magnum remained poised midway in the hand of Palmer—Doctor Small scorched his thumb in the bowl of his pipe; and Mr. Coates was almost choked, by swallowing an inordinate whiff of vapour.

"Young Sir Ranulph!" ejaculated the latter, so soon as the syncope would permit him.

"Sir Ranulph here?" echoed Palmer.

"Good God!" exclaimed Small.

"The devil!" cried Titus, with a start; "this is more than I expected."

"Gentlemen," said Ranulph, "do not let my unexpected arrival here discompose you. Doctor Small, you will excuse the manner of my greeting; and you, Mr. Coates. One of the party, I believe, was my father's medical attendant, a Mr. Tyrconnel."

"I, Sir, had that honour," replied Titus, bowing profoundly.

"When, and at what hour, did he die?" demanded Ranulph.

"Your worthy father," answered Titus, again bowing, "departed this life on Thursday last."

"The hour?—the precise minute?" asked Ranulph, eagerly.

"Faith, Sir Ranulph, as nearly as I can recollect, it might be a few minutes before midnight."

"The very hour!" exclaimed Ranulph,

striding towards the window. His steps were arrested, as his eye fell upon the attire of his father, which, as we have before noticed, hung at that end of the room. A slight shudder passed over his frame. There was a momentary pause, during which Ranulph continued gazing intently at the apparel. "The very dress too!" muttered he; then, turning to the assembly, who were watching his movements with surprise, he requested them to resume their seats. Palmer and the attorney complied instantly, but Doctor Small advanced toward him, and with great kindness of manner, taking hold of Ranulph's hand, drew him into a corner of the room.

"Your sudden return has indeed surprised me—nor can I conceive how intelligence of your father's demise could possibly have reached you in time sufficient to have enabled you to arrive here. Nevertheless, your presence will be most welcome to your parent (would I could say in

affliction)—as well as desirable on all other accounts. Your attendance at the funeral——"

"Which takes place to-night."

"At the mid hour—a strange custom, Sir Ranulph?"

"Strange, indeed!" said Ranulph, musingly.

"Very strange!" reiterated Small, "and might be resisted. *I* should never dream of complying with such conditions."

"Comply with what conditions?" exclaimed Ranulph, starting. "Have I not done his bidding?"

"Whose bidding, my good young friend?" asked Small, surprised at the question.

"Nay, there is some mistake," replied Ranulph, recovering his composure, and smiling faintly. "I am jaded with my journey. An hour's rest will enable me to go through this melancholy ceremony. Where is my mother?"

"Lady Rookwood is, I believe, in her own room," replied Titus. "She desired she might

not be disturbed—and left the whole management of the solemnity to me—of course not anticipating your return, Sir Ranulph—and I trust the arrangements which I have made, will meet with your satisfaction. I have endeavoured, to the best of my power, to maintain the respectability of the family, by doing the thing in the most liberal manner, and in such a way as I knew it would best have pleased my respected friend had he been alive to witness it. Heaven rest him! There is another thing, also, I may as well mention, and I hope the allusion to it will not be distressing to your feelings, Sir Ranulph. According to Sir Piers's directions, his body has been embalmed under my own immediate superintendance; and though I say it, who should not say it, he looks, in consequence, as beautiful as the day he was born. The corpse is now lying in state, with the room lighted up; but, at Lady Rookwood's particular request, I have ordered every sowl in the house to be shut out of the room until ten

o'clock, as her Ladyship has signified her desire to view the remains alone. An order, I assure you, Sir Ranulph, I had some difficulty in enforcing, the tenantry being mighty anxious to see the last of their master. Heaven rest him, I say."

"I will not disturb my mother, at present"—returned the young man; upon whom this piece of information appeared to produce a very painful effect; "nor would I have her know of my arrival. Doctor, I have something for your private ear," addressing Small. "Gentlemen, will you spare us the room for a few minutes?"

"By my conscience," said Tyrconnel to Jack Palmer, as they were going forth, "a mighty fine boy he is—and a chip of the ould block—he'll be as good a fellow as his father."

"No doubt," replied Palmer, shutting the door. "But what the devil brought him back, just at this moment?"

CHAPTER IX.

Fer. Yes, Francisco,
He hath left his curse upon me.
Fran. How?
Fer. His curse! dost comprehend what that word carries,
Shot from a father's angry breath? Unless
I tear poor Felisarda from my heart,
He hath pronounced me heir tó all his curses.
THE BROTHERS.—SHIRLEY.

"THERE is nothing, I trust, my dear young friend and quondam pupil," said Dr. Small, as the door was closed, "that weighs upon your mind, beyond the sorrow naturally incident to an affliction, severe as the present. Forgive my apprehensions, if I am wrong. You know the affectionate interest I have ever felt for you—an interest which, I assure you, is nowise diminished, and which will excuse my urging you to

unburthen your mind to me; assuring yourself, whatever may be your disclosure, of my sincere sympathy and commiseration. I may be better able to advise with you, should counsel be necessary, than others, from my knowledge of your character and temperament. I would not anticipate evil, and am perhaps, unnecessarily apprehensive; but I own, I am startled at the incoherence of your expressions, coupled with your sudden, and almost mysterious appearance at this distressing conjuncture. Answer me: has your return been the result of mere accident? is it to be considered one of those singular circumstances which almost looks like fate, and baffles our comprehension? or were you nearer home than we expected, and received the news of your father's demise through any channel unknown by us? Satisfy my curiosity, I pray you, upon this point?"

"Your curiosity, my dear sir," replied Ranulph, gravely and sadly, "will not be decreased, when I tell you, that my return has

neither been the work of chance (for I came, fully anticipating the dread event, which I find realised), nor has it been occasioned by any intelligence derived from yourself, or elsewhere. It was only indeed at Rookwood that I received full confirmation of my fears. I had another, a more terrible summons to return."

"What summons?—you perplex me!"—exclaimed Small.

"I am myself perplexed—sorely perplexed," returned Ranulph. "I have much to tell—much to relate; but, I pray you, bear with me to the end. I have that on my mind which, like guilt, must be revealed. It will out."

"Speak, then, fearlessly to me," said Small, affectionately pressing Ranulph's hand. "I am all impatience for your relation, and will offer no further interruption to it."

"It will be necessary," began Ranulph, "to preface my narrative by some slight allusion to certain painful events (and yet I know not why I should call them *painful*, excepting in their

consequences), which influenced my conduct in my final interview between my father and myself—an interview which occasioned my departure for the continent—and which was of a character so dreadful, that I would not even revert to it, were it not a necessary preliminary to the circumstance which I am about to detail. You remember, no doubt, how hastily my journey was resolved upon. My ostensible motive for undertaking it you may also have heard; not so, I am sure, the real one. To you, who knew my father so well, and were aware of the tenor of his life, I need not particularise the terms upon which we lived together; you could not have been ignorant of them. My affection for him was constant and consistent. There was no corresponding sympathy on his part; he never loved me as his son, or, if he did, his love for me was more fickle, more variable, more capricious, than the lightest woman's regards. Mortified and distressed at having my affections so frequently thrown back

upon themselves, I contrived to regulate and controul my own feelings, by drawing out for myself a code of conduct, so nice and guarded, that no quarrel of consequence could arise between us; and, by yielding implicitly in every thing to his wishes, I insensibly acquired an ascendancy over him, which, without deviating from the strict line of filial duty, was as advantageous in its effects to himself as to me. But this system could not hold good in every case, as you will perceive.

"When I left Oxford, I passed a few weeks alone, in London. A college friend, whom I accidentally met, introduced me, during a promenade in St. James's Park, to some acquaintances of his own, who were taking an airing in the Mall at the same time;—a family whose name was Mowbray, consisting of a widow-lady, her son, and daughter. This introduction was made in compliance with my own request. I had been struck by the singular beauty of the younger lady, whose countenance had a peculiar

and inexpressible charm to me, from its marked resemblance to the portrait of the lady Eleanor Rookwood, whose charms, and whose unhappy fate, I have so often dwelt upon, and deplored. The picture is there," pointing to it, " and how like, how wonderfully like, it is. How often have I gazed at it with a fervour like that of a devotee before some ' sainted semblance,' little dreaming of those after-emotions of which it should be the germ! Look at it, and you have the fair creature I speak of, before you; the colour of the hair—the tenderness of the eyes. No—the expression is not so sad, except when—but no matter; I recognised her features at once.

" It struck me, that upon the mention of my name, the party had betrayed some surprise, especially the elder lady. For my own part, I was so attracted by the beauty of the daughter, the effect of which upon me, seemed rather the fulfilment of a predestined event, originating in the strange fascination which the family portrait

had wrought in my heart, than the operation of what is called, 'love at first sight,' that I was insensible to the agitation of the mother. In vain I endeavoured to rally myself; my efforts at conversation were fruitless; I could not talk —all I could do, was silently to yield to the soft witchery of those tender eyes, my admiration increasing each instant that I gazed upon them.

"I accompanied them home. Attracted as by some irresistible spell, I could not tear myself away; so that, although I fancied I could perceive symptoms of displeasure in the looks of both the mother and the son, yet, regardless of consequences, I ventured, uninvited, to enter the house. In order to shake off the restraint which I felt my society imposed, I found it absolutely necessary to divest myself of bashfulness, and to exert such conversational powers as I possessed. I succeeded so well, that the discourse soon became lively and animated; and what chiefly delighted me was, that *she*, for

whose sweet sake I had committed my present rudeness, became radiant with smiles. I had been all eagerness, to seek for some explanation of the resemblance to which I have just alluded, and the fitting moment had, I conceived, arrived. I called attention to a peculiar expression in the features of Miss Mowbray, and then instanced the likeness that subsisted between her and my ancestress. 'It is the more singular,' I said, turning to her mother, 'because there could have been no affinity, that I am aware of, between them, and yet the likeness is really surprising.'—'It is not so singular as you imagine,' answered Mrs. Mowbray, 'there *is* affinity; that Lady Rookwood was my mother. Eleanor Mowbray *does* resemble her ill-fated ancestress.'

"Words cannot paint my astonishment. I gazed at Mrs. Mowbray, considering whether I had not misconstrued her speech—whether I had not so shaped the sounds, as to suit my own quick and passionate conceptions. But no

—I read in her calm, collected countenance—in the downcast glance, and sudden sadness of Eleanor, as well as in the changed and haughty demeanour of the brother, that I had heard her rightly. It was a truth. Eleanor Mowbray was my cousin—was the descendant of that sainted woman, whose image I had almost worshipped.

" Recovering from my surprise, I addressed Mrs. Mowbray, endeavouring to excuse my ignorance of our relationship, on the plea that I had not been given to understand that such had been the name of the gentleman she had espoused. ' Nor was it,' answered she, ' the name he bore at Rookwood ; circumstances forbad it then. How *should* you have known? From the hour I quitted that house until this moment, excepting one interview with my—with Sir Reginald Rookwood—I have seen none of my family—have held no communication with them—my brothers have been strangers to me —the very name of Rookwood has been unheard,

unknown; nor would you have been admitted here, had not accident occasioned it.' I ventured now to interrupt her, and to express a hope that she would suffer an acquaintance to be kept up, which had so fortunately commenced, and which might most probably bring about an entire reconciliation between the families. I was so earnest in my expostulations, my whole soul being in them, that she inclined a more friendly ear to me. Eleanor, too, smiled encouragement upon me. Love lent me eloquence; and at length, as a token of *my* success, and her own relenting, Mrs. Mowbray held forth her hand; I clasped it eagerly. It was the happiest moment of my life.

" ' But, then, your father,' said Mrs. Mowbray, after a short space, ' what will he say to this?'

" ' I hope, nay, I am sure, he will rejoice at it,' I answered; but my heart smote me with a bitter presentiment, and I thought I saw a very slight tremor in Eleanor's countenance, so slight,

indeed, as to be imperceptible to any other eye than that of a lover. 'At all events,' said I, 'I am a free agent.'

"'No,' replied Mrs. Mowbray, 'unless he is willing that the intimacy be renewed, and will himself make the advances, I will never acquiesce in it.'

"It was in vain I again urged all my former arguments; she was inflexible; and the utmost I could obtain from her, was permission to visit at her house daily during my brief continuance in town. To this she unwillingly consented: but my solicitation was backed by her son, Captain Mowbray, who now came forward in the most friendly manner, and urged his mother to accede to my wishes.

"You may suppose that I did not hesitate to avail myself of this permission. The next day found me there, and the next. I then learnt the history of the family. For many years they had dwelt in the South of France, where Mr. Mowbray had died. The son had visited

England, entered the army, and risen to his present rank. Their fortune was slender, but sufficient. After having spent some years in active service, Captain Mowbray returned to his family, and brought them over with him to this country. They had resided in London then nearly two years.

"I will not trouble you with any lengthened description of Eleanor Mowbray. I hope, at some period or other, you may still be enabled to see her, and judge for yourself; for though adverse circumstances have hitherto conspired to separate us, the time for a renewal of our acquaintance is approaching, I trust, for I am not yet altogether without hope. But thus much, I must say, that her rare endowments of person were only equalled by the graces of her mind.

"Educated abroad, she had all the vivacity of our livelier neighbours, combined with every solid qualification, which we claim as more essentially our own. Her light and frolic manner was French, certainly; but her gentle, sincere

heart was as surely English. The foreign accent that dwelt upon her tongue, communicated an inexpressible charm, even to the language which she spoke.

"I will not dwell too long upon this theme. I feel ashamed of my own prolixity. And yet I am sure you will pardon it. Ah! those bright, brief days! too quickly were they fled! I could expatiate upon each minute—recal each word—revive each look. It may not be—I must hasten on. Darker themes await me.

"My love made rapid progress. I became each hour more enamoured of my new-found cousin. My whole time was passed near her; indeed, I could scarcely exist, in absence from her side. Short, however, was destined to be my indulgence in this blissful state. One happy week was its extent. I received a peremptory summons from my father to return home.

"Immediately upon commencing this acquaintance, I had written to my father, explaining every particular attending it. This I should

have done of my own free will, but I was urged to it by Mrs. Mowbray. Unaccustomed to disguise, I had expatiated upon the beauty of Eleanor, and in such terms, I fear, that I excited some uneasiness in his breast. His letter was laconic. He made no allusion to the subject upon which I had expatiated when writing to him. He commanded me to return.

" The bitter hour was at hand. I could not hesitate to comply. Without my father's sanction, I was assured Mrs. Mowbray would not permit any continuance of my acquaintance. Of Eleanor's inclinations I fancied I had some assurance; but without her mother's consent, to whose will she was devoted, I felt, had I even been inclined to urge it, that my suit was hopeless. The letter which I had received from my father made me more than doubt, whether I should not find him utterly adverse to my wishes. Agonized, therefore, with a thousand apprehensions, I presented myself on the morn of my departure. It was then I made the

declaration of my passion to Eleanor—it was then that every hope was confirmed, every apprehension realized. I received from her lips a confirmation of my fondest wishes; yet were those hopes blighted in the bud, when I heard, at the same time, that their consummation was dependant on the will of two others, whose assenting voices, she feared, could never be obtained. From Mrs. Mowbray I received a more decided reply. All her haughtiness was aroused. Her farewell words assured me, that it was indifferent to her, whether we met again as relatives or as strangers. Then was it that the native tenderness of Eleanor displayed itself, in an outbreak of feeling peculiar to a heart keenly sympathetic as her's. She saw my suffering—the reserve natural to her sex gave way—she flung herself into my arms—and so we parted.

" With a heavy foreboding, I returned to Rookwood, and, oppressed with the gloomiest anticipations, I endeavoured to prepare myself for the worst. I arrived. My reception was such as

I had calculated upon; and, to increase my distress, my parents had been at variance. I will not pain you and myself with any recital of their disagreement. My mother had espoused my cause, chiefly, I fear, with the view of thwarting my poor father's inclinations. He was in a terrible mood, exasperated by the fiery stimulants he had swallowed, which had not, indeed, drowned his reason, but roused and inflamed every dormant emotion to violence. He was as one insane. It was evening when I arrived. I would willingly have postponed the interview till the morrow. It could not be. He insisted upon seeing me.

"My mother was present. You know the restraint she usually had over my father, and how she maintained it. On this occasion, she had none. He questioned me as to every particular; probed my secret soul—dragged forth every latent feeling, and then thundered out his own determination that Eleanor never should be bride of mine; nor would he receive, under

his roof, her mother, the discountenanced daughter of his father. I endeavoured to remonstrate with him. He was deaf to my entreaties. My mother added sharp and stinging words to my expostulations. 'I had her consent,' she said; what more was needed? 'The lands were entailed. I should at no distant period be their master, and might then please myself.' This I mention, in order to give you my father's strange answer.

"'Have a care, madam,' replied he, 'and bridle your tongue; they *are* entailed, 'tis true, but I need not ask *his* consent to cut off that entail. Let him dare to disobey me in this particular, and I will so divert the channel of my wealth, that no drop shall touch him. I will—but why threaten?—let him do it, and approve the consequences.'

"On the morrow I renewed my importunities, with no better success. We were alone.

"'Ranulph,' said he, 'you waste time, in seeking to change my resolution; it is unalter-

able. I have many motives which influence me; they are inexplicable, but imperative. Eleanor Mowbray never can be your's. Forget her as speedily as may be, and I pledge myself, upon whomsoever else your choice may fix, I will offer no obstacle.'

"'But why,' exclaimed I, with vehemence, 'do you object to one whom you have never beheld? At least, consent to see her.'

"'Never!' he replied. 'The tie is sundered, and cannot be reunited; my father bound me by an oath, never to meet in friendship with my sister. I will not break my vow. I will not violate its conditions, even in the second degree. We never can meet again. An idle prophecy, which I have heard, has said, "*that when a Rookwood shall marry a Rookwood, the end of the house draweth nigh.*" That I regard not. It may have no meaning, or it may have much. To me it imports nothing further, than that if you wed Eleanor, every acre I possess shall depart from you. And assure yourself this is no

idle threat; I can, and will do it. My curse shall be your sole inheritance.'

"I could not avoid making some reply, representing to him how unjustifiable such a procedure was to me, in a case where the happiness of my life was at stake; and how inconsistent it was with the charitable precepts of our faith, to allow feelings of resentment to influence his conduct. My remonstrances, as in the preceding meeting, were ineffectual. The more I spoke, the more intemperate he grew; I desisted, therefore; but not before he had ordered me to quit the house. I did not leave the neighbourhood, but saw him again on the same evening.

"Our last interview took place in the garden. I then told him that I had determined to go abroad for two years, at the expiration of which period I proposed returning to England; trusting that his resolution might then be changed, and that he would listen to my request, for the fulfilment of which I could never cease to hope. Time, I trusted, might befriend me. He ap-

proved of my plan of travelling, requesting me not to see Eleanor before I set out; adding, in a melancholy tone,—'We may never meet again, Ranulph, in this life; in that case, farewell for ever. Indulge no vain hopes. Eleanor never can be your's, but upon one condition, and to that you would never consent!'—'Name it!' I cried; 'there is no condition I could not accede to.'—'Rash boy!' he replied; 'you know not what you say; that pledge you would never fulfil, were I to propose it to you; but no—should I survive till you return, you shall know it then—and, now, farewell.'—'Speak now, I beseech you!' I exclaimed; 'any thing, every thing—what you will!'—'Say no more,' replied he, walking towards the house; 'when you return, we will renew this subject; farewell—perhaps for ever.' His words were prophetic—that parting *was* for ever. I remained in the garden till nightfall. I saw my mother, but *he* came not again. I quitted England, without beholding Eleanor."

"Did you not acquaint her, by letter, with what had occurred, and your consequent intentions?" inquired Small.

"I did," replied Ranulph; "but received no reply. My earliest inquiries will be directed to ascertain whether the family are still in London. It will be a question for our consideration, whether I am not justified in departing from my father's expressed wishes, or whether I should violate his commands in so doing."

"We will discuss that point hereafter," replied Small, adding, as he noticed the growing paleness of his companion—"You are too exhausted to proceed—you had better defer the remainder of your story to a future period."

"Sir," replied Ranulph, filling himself a glass of water, "I am exhausted, yet I cannot rest—my blood is in a fever, which nothing will allay. I shall feel more easy, when I have made the present communication. I am approaching the sequel of my narrative. You are now in possession of the story of my love—of the motive

of my departure. You shall learn what was the motive of my return.

"I had wandered from city to city during my term of exile—consumed by hopeless passion—with little that could amuse *me*, though surrounded by a thousand objects of interest to others, and only rendering life endurable by severest study, or most active exertion. My steps conducted me to Bourdeaux;—there I made a long halt, enchanted by the beauty of the neighbouring scenery. My fancy was smitten by the situation of a villa on the banks of the Garonne, within a few leagues of the city. It was an old château, with fine gardens bordering the blue waters of the river, and commanding a multitude of enchanting prospects. The house, which had in part gone to decay, was inhabited by an aged couple, who had formerly been servants to an English family, the members of which had thus provided for them on their return to their own country. I inquired the name. Conceive my astonish-

ment, to find that this château had been the residence of the Mowbrays. This intelligence decided me at once—I took up my abode in the house; and a new and unexpected source of solace and delight was opened to me. I traced the paths *she* had traced—occupied the room *she* had occupied—tended the flowers *she* had tended; and, on the golden summer eves would watch the rapid waters, tinged with all the glorious hues of sunset, sweeping past my feet, and think how *she* had watched them. Her presence so seemed to pervade the place. I was now comparatively happy, and, anxious to remain unmolested, I wrote home that I was leaving Bourdeaux for the Pyrennees, on my way to Spain."

"That account arrived," said Small.

"One night," continued Ranulph, "'tis now the sixth since the occurrence I am about to relate, I was seated in a bower that overlooked the river. It had been a lovely even—so lovely, that I lingered there, wrapt in the heavenly

contemplation of its beauties. I watched each rosy tint reflected upon the surface of the rapid stream—now fading into yellow—now shining silvery white. I noted the mystic mingling of twilight with darkness—of night with day, till the bright current on a sudden became a black mass of waters. I could scarce discern a leaf—all was darkness—when lo! another change! The moon was up—a flood of light deluged all around—the stream was dancing again in reflected radiance, and I still lingering at its brink.

"I had been musing for some moments, with my head resting upon my hand, when, happening to raise my eyes, I beheld a figure immediately before me. I was astonished at the sight, for I had perceived no one approach—had heard no footstep advance towards me, and was satisfied that no one besides myself could be in the garden. The presence of the figure inspired me with an undefinable awe; and, I can scarce tell why, but a thrilling pre-

sentiment convinced me that it was a supernatural visitant. Without motion—without life—without substance, it seemed; yet still the outward character of life was there. I started to my feet. God! what did I behold? The face was turned to me—*my father's face!* And what an aspect—what a look! Time can never efface that terrible gesture; it is graven upon my memory—I cannot describe it. It was not anger—it was not pain: it was as if an eternity of woe were stamped upon its features. It was too dreadful to behold. I would fain have averted my gaze—my eyes were fascinated—fixed—I could not withdraw them from the ghastly countenance. I shrunk from it, yet stirred not—I could not move a limb. Noiselessly gliding towards me, the apparition approached—I could not retreat—it stood obstinately beside me. I became like one half dead. The phantom shook its head with the deepest despair; and as the word 'Return!' sounded hollowly in my ears, it gradually

melted from my view. I cannot tell how I recovered from the swoon into which I fell, but day-break saw me on my way to England. I am here. On that night—at that same hour, my father died."

"It was, after all, then, a supernatural summons that you received?" said Small.

"Undoubtedly," replied Ranulph.

"Ah! well, the coincidence, I own, is sufficiently curious," returned Small, musingly; "and it is difficult to offer any satisfactory explanation of the delusion."

"Delusion!" echoed Ranulph; "there was no delusion—the figure was as palpable as your own. Can I doubt, when I behold this result? Could any deceit have been practised upon me, at that distance?—the precise time, moreover, agreeing. Did not the phantom bid me return? —I have returned—he is dead. I have gazed upon a being of another world. To doubt were impious, after that look."

"Whatever my opinions may be, my dear

young friend," said Small, "I will suspend them for the present—you are still greatly excited; let me advise you to seek some repose."

"I am easier," replied Ranulph; "but you are right, I will endeavour to snatch a little rest. Something within tells me all is not yet accomplished. What remains?—I shudder to think of it. I will rejoin you at midnight—I shall myself attend this solemnity—Adieu!"

Ranulph quitted the room. Small sighingly shook his head, and having lighted his pipe, was presently buried in a profundity of smoke and speculation.

CHAPTER X.

Fran. de Med. Your unhappy husband
Is dead—
Vit. Cor. Oh, he's a happy husband!
Now he owes nature nothing.
Mon. And look upon this creature as his wife.
She comes not like a widow—she comes armed
With scorn and impudence. Is this a *mourning* habit?

THE WHITE DEVIL.

THE progress of our narrative demands our presence in another apartment of the hall—a large darksome chamber, situate in the eastern wing of the house, which we have before described as the most ancient part of the building—the sombre appearance of which was greatly increased by the dingy, discoloured tapestry that clothed its walls, the record of the patience and

industry of a certain Dame Dorothy Rookwood, who flourished some centuries ago, and whose skilful needle had illustrated the slaughter of the Innocents, with a severity of *gusto*, and sanguinary minuteness of detail, truly surprising, in a lady so amiable as she was represented to have been. Grim-visaged Herod glared from the ghostly woof, with his shadowy legions, executing their murderous purposes, grouped like an infernal host around him. Mysterious twilight, admitted through the deep, dark, mullioned windows, revealed the antique furniture of the room, which still boasted a sort of dusky splendour, more imposing, perhaps, than its original gaudy magnificence, and showed the lofty hangings, and tall, hearse-like canopy of a bedstead, once a couch of state, but now destined for the repose of Lady Rookwood. The stiff crimson hangings were embroidered in gold, with the emblazonment of Elizabeth, from whom the apartment, having once been occupied by

that sovereign, obtained the name of the "Queen's Room."

The sole tenant of this chamber was a female, in whose countenance, if time and strong emotion had written strange defeatures, they had not obliterated its striking beauty, and classical grandeur of contour. Her's was a face majestical and severe—an index of a soul, at once daring in conception, and resolute in action; changeless in its purposes—unyielding—haughty. Pride, immeasurable pride, was stamped in all its lines; and though each passion was, by turns, developed, it was evident that all were subordinate to that sin by which the angels fell. The outline of her face was formed in the purest Grecian mould, and would have been a model for the representation of some vengeful deity; so much did the gloomy grandeur of the brow, the severe chiselling of the lip, the rounded beauty of the throat, and the faultless symmetry of her full form, accord with the beau ideal of antique per-

fection. Shaded by smooth folds of raven hair, which still maintained its jetty dye, her lofty forehead would have been displayed to the greatest advantage, had it not been at this moment corrugated and deformed, by excess of passion, if that passion can be said to deform, which only calls forth strong and vehement expression. Her figure, which wanted only height to give it dignity, was arrayed in the garb of widowhood; and if she exhibited none of the anguish and desolation of heart, which such a bereavement might have been expected to awaken, she was evidently a prey to feelings scarcely less harrowing. At the particular time of which we speak, this person was occupied in the perusal of a pile of papers. Her gaze, at length, became rivetted upon a letter, taken from a heap of others, which at once arrested her attention. As she read, her whole soul became absorbed in its contents. Suddenly she raised herself, and, crushing the letter within

her hand, cast it from her, with a look of ineffable scorn.

"Fool! fool!" exclaimed she, aloud, "weak, wavering, and contemptible fool—this alone was wanting, to fulfil the measure of loathing for thee, and for thy memory. The very air I breathed with thee in life, seemed contaminated with thy presence. With thee near me, I had ever the consciousness of the hated ties which bound us together, which I would have broken, could I thereby have accomplished my purposes; but now that I deemed I was for ever ridden of thee—thou despised worm—that thou shouldst have the power to injure me thus—to blight my fairest plans—to put a bar between me and my views—to inflict a wrong which could only have been cancelled by thy life, which should have been the forfeit, had I known this heretofore; to think that I can no longer reach thee—that death has placed an impassable barrier between us, which even revenge

cannot o'erleap. *That* thought galls me—stings me to the quick; and if curses can reach beyond the grave, may mine meet thee there, and cling to thee; may heaven adjudge thee to an eternity of torture, agonizing as the hell of heart I now endure! And surely," added she, after a pause, "the flame of vengeance which I felt to be part of the spirit that burns within me, will not expire, when I throw off this fleshly shroud—nor be incapable of executing its tremendous purposes. Oh that my soul could now pursue thee to thy viewless home!"

During the utterance of this imprecation, the features of Lady Rookwood, for she it was, had undergone a marked and fearful change. Her flaming eye, glistening with unnatural brightness, suddenly lost its lustre—her quivering lip, its agitated motion—her distended nostril—its tension—her upraised arm fell heavily to her side—she stood like one entranced, as if transformed to stone.

A deep-drawn sigh proclaimed the return of

consciousness, and her first movement was slowly to return to the escritoir, whence she had taken the letter, which had caused her agitation. Examining the papers which it contained, with great deliberation, she threw each aside, as soon as she had satisfied herself of its purport, until she arrived at a little package, carefully tied up with black ribbon, and sealed. This, Lady Rookwood hastily broke open, and drew forth a small miniature. It was that of a female, young and beautiful, rudely, yet faithfully executed—faithfully, we say, for there was an air of sweetness, and simplicity—and, in short, a look of *reality* and nature, about the picture (it is seldom, indeed, that we mistake a *likeness*, even if ignorant of the original), which attested the artist's fidelity. The face was radiant with smiles, as a bright day with sunbeams. The portrait was set in gold, and behind it was looped a lock of the darkest and finest hair. A slip of paper was also attached to it.

Lady Rookwood scornfully scrutinized the

features for a few moments, and then unfolded the paper, at the sight of which she started, and turned pale. "Thank God," she cried, "this is in my possession—while I hold this, we are safe. Were it not better to destroy this evidence at once?—No, no, not *now*—it shall not part from me. I will abide Ranulph's return." Placing the marriage certificate, for such it was, within her breast, and laying the miniature upon the table, she next proceeded, deliberately, to arrange the disordered contents of the box. She then stooped to pick up the crumpled letter, and, after carefully adjusting its creases, returned, once more, to its perusal.

All outward traces of emotion had, ere this, become so subdued, in Lady Rookwood, that although she had, only a few moments previously, exhibited the extremity of passionate indignation, she now, apparently without effort, resumed entire composure, and might have been supposed to be engaged in a matter of little interest to herself. It was a dread calm, which

they who knew her would have trembled to behold. "From this letter, I gather," exclaimed she, "that their wretched offspring knows not of his fortune. That is well—there is no channel, whence he can derive information, and my first care shall be to prevent his obtaining any clue to the secret of his birth. I am directed to provide for him—ha, ha! I will provide—a grave. There will I bury him and his secret. My son's security, and my own revenge, demand it. I must choose surer hands—the work must not be half done, as heretofore. And now, I bethink me, he is in the neighbourhood, connected with a gang of poachers—'tis well"—even as she spoke, a knock at the chamber door broke upon her meditations. "Agnes, is it you?" demanded Lady Rookwood.

Thus summoned, the old attendant entered the room.

"Why are my orders disobeyed?" asked the lady, in a severe tone of voice. "Did I not say, when you delivered me this package from Mr.

Coates, which he himself wished to present, I would be undisturbed."

"You did, my Lady, but—"

"Well," said Lady Rookwood, somewhat more mildly, perceiving, from Agnes' manner, that she had something of importance to communicate. "What is it brings thee hither, now?"

"Sorry am I," exclaimed Agnes, "right sorry, to disturb your Ladyship, but—but—"

"But what?"

"I could not help it, my Lady—he would have me come; he said he was resolved to see your Ladyship, whether I would or not."

"*Would* see me, ha!—is it so? I guess his errand, and its object; he has some suspicion. No, that cannot be—he would not dare to tamper with these seals. I will not see him."

"But he swears, my Lady, that he will not leave the house, without seeing you—he would have forced his way into your presence, if I had not consented to announce him."

"Insolent!" exclaimed Lady Rookwood, with a glance of indignation; "*force* his way! admit him. I promise you he shall not display an equal anxiety to repeat the visit. Tell Mr. Coates I *will* see him."

"Mr. Coates!—bless you, my Lady, it's not he; he'd never have intruded upon you, unask'd, depend upon it. No; he knows, too well, what he's about, to do such a thing. This is—"

"Who?"

"Luke Bradley—your Ladyship knows who I mean."

"He here—now?—"

"Yes, my Lady; and, looking so fierce and strange, I was quite frightened to see him. He looked so like his—his—"

"His father, thou would'st say—speak out."

"No, my Lady, his grandfather—old Sir Reginald. He's the very image of him; but had not your Ladyship better ring the alarm bell? and when he comes in, I'll run and fetch the servants—he's dangerous, I'm sure."

"Dangerous—how? I have no fears of him. He will see me, you say—"

"Ay, *will*," exclaimed Luke, as he threw open the door, and shut it forcibly after him, striding towards Lady Rookwood, "nor abide longer delay."

It was an instant or two, ere Lady Rookwood, thus taken by surprise, could command speech. She fixed her eyes, with a look of keen and angry inquiry, upon the bold intruder, who, nothing daunted, confronted her gaze, with one as stern and stedfast as her own. Luke was pale, even to ghastliness.

"Who are you, and what seek you?" exclaimed Lady Rookwood, after a brief pause, and, in spite of herself, her voice sounded tremulously. "What would you have with me, that you venture to appear before me at this season, and in this fashion?"

"I might have chosen a fitter opportunity," returned Luke, "were it needed. My business will not brook delay—you must be pleased to

overlook this intrusion on your privacy, at a *season of sorrow*, like the present. As to the fashion of my visit, you must be content to excuse *that*—I cannot help myself—I may amend hereafter. *Who* I am, you are able, I doubt not, to surmise. *What* I seek, you shall hear, when this old woman has left the room, unless you would have a witness, to a declaration that concerns you as nearly as myself."

An indefinite feeling of apprehension had, from the first instant of Luke's entrance, crossed Lady Rookwood's mind. She, however, answered with some calmness:—

"What you can have to say, is of small moment to me—nor does it signify who may hear it. It shall not, however, be said, that Lady Rookwood feared to be alone, even though she peril'd her life."

"I am no assassin," replied Luke, "nor have sought the destruction of my deadliest foe—though 'twere but retributive justice to have done so."

Lady Rookwood started.

"You need not fear me," replied Luke; "my revenge will be otherwise accomplished."

"Go," said Lady Rookwood to Agnes—"yet—stay without, in the anti-chamber."

"My Lady," said Agnes, scarcely able to articulate, "shall I——"

"Hear me, Lady Rookwood," interrupted Luke, "before this woman departs. I intend you no injury—meditate no harm to you, or to any one—my object here is solely to obtain a private conference with yourself. You can have no reason for denying me this request. I will not abuse your patience—mine is no idle mission. Say you refuse me, and I will at once depart. A word will suffice—I am gone. I will find other means of communicating with you—less direct, and therefore less desirable—make your election; but we *must* be alone—undisturbed. Summon your household—let them lay hands upon me, and I will proclaim to all what you would gladly hide, even from yourself."

"Leave us, Agnes," said Lady Rookwood—"alarm no one. I have no fear. I can deal with him myself, should I see occasion."

"Agnes," said Luke, in a stern, deep whisper, arresting the ancient hand-maiden as she passed him, "Stir not from the door till I come forth. Have you forgotten your former mistress—my mother? have you forgotten Barbara Lovel, and that night?"

"In heaven's name hush!" replied Agnes, with a shudder.

"Let that be fresh in your memory. Move not a footstep, whatever you may hear," added he, in the same tone as before.

"I will not—I will not;"—and Agnes departed.

Luke felt some wavering in his resolution when he found himself alone with the lady, whose calm, collected, yet haughty demeanour, as she resumed her seat, prepared for his communication, could not fail to inspire him with a certain degree of awe. Not unconscious of

her advantage, nor slow to profit by it, Lady Rookwood remained perfectly silent, with her eyes steadily and scrutinisingly fixed upon his face, while his embarrassment momentarily increased. Summoning, at length, courage sufficient to address her, and ashamed of his want of nerve, he thus broke forth :—

" When I entered this room, you asked my name and object. As to the first, I answer to the same designation as your Ladyship. I have long borne my mother's name—I now claim my father's. My object is, the restitution of my rights."

" So—it is as I suspected," thought Lady Rookwood, involuntarily casting her large eyes down—" Do I hear you rightly ?" exclaimed she, aloud—" your name is——"

" Sir Luke Rookwood. As my father's elder born ; by right of *his* right to that title."

If a glance could have slain him, Luke had fallen lifeless at the lady's feet. With a smile of ineffable disdain, she said, " I know not why

I tolerate this insolent assumption of my son's dignity—even for an instant. This defamation of my husband's name from thy lips to me—"

"Defamation of him in my lips, and to you!" interrupted Luke, scornfully.

"Peace!" cried Lady Rookwood. "I would learn how far thy audacity will carry thee. The name you bear is Bradley?"

"In ignorance I did so," replied Luke. "I am the son of her whose maiden name is Bradley. She was——"

"'Tis false—I will not hear it—she was not," cried Lady Rookwood; her vehemence getting the master of her prudence.

"Your Ladyship anticipates my meaning," returned Luke. "This is a house of mourning. He who lies a breathless corpse within its walls, your husband, was my father."

"That may be true."

"My mother was his wife."

"Thou liest—*she* his wife."

"His wedded wife."

"His mistress—his minion, if thou wilt; nought else. Thou frantic fool, who has juggled thee with a tale like this? *Wife!* A low born jade, *his* wife: Sir Piers Rookwood's wife—ha, ha! thy fellow hinds would jeer thee out of this preposterous notion. Is it new to thee, that a village wench, who lends herself to shame, should be beguiled by such pretences? That she was so duped, I doubt not; but it is too late now to complain, and I would counsel thee not to repeat thine idle boast. It will serve no other purpose, trust me, than to blazon forth thy own, thy mother's dishonour."

"Dishonour!" furiously reiterated Luke. "My mother's fame is as free from dishonour as your own. Injured she was—her reputation, which was without blemish and without spot, hath been tarnished and traduced; but it shall, ere long, be made clear in the light of day; nor she, nor her offspring, be a byeword amongst men. Hear me, Lady Rookwood; I

assert that Susan Bradley was the first Lady of Sir Piers—that I, her child, am first in the inheritance; nay, am sole heir to her husband's estates and to his titles, to the exclusion of your son. Ponder upon that intelligence—it is a truth—a truth I can establish, for I have proofs—such proofs as will confound you and your arts, were they dark and subtle as witchcraft. I will burst your spells. Men say they fear you, as a thing of ill. *I* fear you not—it is your turn to blanch. There *have* been days when the Rookwoods held their dames in subjection. Discern you nought of that in me? Is there nothing of the Rookwood about me?"

As Lady Rookwood gazed at him, her heart acknowledged the truth of his assertion. Passion prevented her speech. She looked a scornful negative, and motioned Luke to depart.

"No!" exclaimed Luke; "my errand is not complete; nor can I suffer your ladyship to quit the room, till you have heard me to an end."

"Not *suffer* me," answered Lady Rookwood, raising herself, and moving towards the door. How, ruffian, will you detain me?"

"By showing you the danger of departure," said Luke. "By your leave, Lady, you *must* obey me," he added, taking her arm.

"Never!" exclaimed Lady Rookwood; her hitherto scarce governable passion enraged beyond all bounds by this last act. "Obey *thy* mandate! Stay at *thy* bidding! Release my hand, or by heaven I will stab thee on the spot." And as Luke quitted not his hold, she suddenly snatched up a small penknife, the only weapon of offence at hand, which happened to be lying open upon the table, and struck it with all her force against his breast. Luke, however, sustained no injury. Encountering some hard substance, the slight blade snapped at the haft, without inflicting even a scratch, and Luke, grasping the hand that had aimed the blow, forcibly detained it, while a smile of fierce triumph played upon his features.

"What would you do?" exclaimed Lady Rookwood.

"Falsify your calumnies: yourself have furnished me with the means. Look here." And clutching her hand, he drew from out the folds of his waistcoat the skeleton hand of his mother, in the bones of which the broken blade was sticking. "This dead hand, which has this instant, in all probability, preserved my life, was my mother's! It has done this — it will do more—it will accomplish all the rest. See," added he, stretching forth the shrunken finger, and placing it close by Lady Rookwood's own hand, who recoiled from contact with it, as from the touch of a scorpion—"That ring was placed where you now see it before your own was proffered—that cold hand was prest to your husband's, at the altar, before his faith was plighted to you. His faith to her was broken, but the vows he broke, were *marriage vows*. The living hand may part with its ring to another—the dead will retain possession, while matter shall

endure. Compare them together The one through her brief life, was ever gentle, ever kindly, ever yielding—the other grasping, severe, inexorable. That is instinct with vitality—with power—this incapable of motion—dead. Yet shall this nerveless hand accomplish more than the living. Years have flown since this ring was placed upon the finger; yet hath it not corroded —not relinquished its hold. Look at it, Lady; consider it well—touch it—examine it—'tis real —actual—your own in shape—in substance—in design; for the same holy end procured—with the same solemn plight bestowed—all the same—save that it was the *first*—ay, the first —let that confound you—let that convince you. With what a voice this silent circlet speaks—how eloquent—how loud. I have no other witnesses—yet will this suffice. Of those to whom I owe my being, both are dead. Can neither answer to my call? She sleeps within the tomb that now yawns to receive him: he is on his way thither; yet *this* remains to answer

for both—to cry out, as from the depths of the grave, for justice to me. Look at it, I say; can you look, and longer doubt? You cannot—dare not—do not. I read conviction in your quaking glance—in your averted countenance."

Saying which, he relinquished his hold, and Lady Rookwood withdrew her hand. There is an eloquence, inspired by intense emotion, so vivid, that it never fails to produce a convincing effect, even upon an auditor the most determinately incredulous. So was it with Lady Rookwood. Aware, before-hand, of the truth of Luke's statement, she would nevertheless have admitted nothing; but her daring determination was overwhelmed by surprise at the extent of his knowledge, and by the irresistible vehemence of his manner. With little of their characteristic caution, Luke seemed to inherit all the inborn, terrible impetuosity of his ancestry; and Lady Rookwood's secret soul admitted, that one of the same order as the fierce race, with whose remorseless annals she was too

well acquainted, was before her. Some flashes of such a spirit she had heretofore observed in Sir Piers; but a violence like the present she had never before beheld. She heard his words, and her heart, while it swelled with rage, trembled with fear, as yet unknown to her. Contending emotions agitated her frame; pride, shame, rage, and fear, strove for the mastery. With averted head, she seemed lost in thought, while Luke gazed darkly on. Suddenly she turned round, exclaiming, in a tone that startled him, as much as the unexpected admission which her words contained,

"I am convinced it is so. You are his son."

"His heir?"

"Ay."

"You admit it?"

"Have I not said so?"

"The title is my right?"

"Granted."

"The lands?"

"Your *right* also."

"You will yield possession?"

"When you have *won* it; but not till *then*. Fool! do you take me for an idiot like yourself—like your father? I *do* believe your story—there is no degradation of which I do not deem Sir Piers to have been capable. All thou couldst invent, of folly and insanity, would not equal my conceptions of his capacity to enact them. I believe it all—fully—implicitly; yet I defy thee. Let the thought, that I know thy rights, but will never acknowledge them, rankle, like a barbed arrow, in thy side; and that I also know thy inability to maintain them. *Thou can'st not prove it.* Ha, ha! Now where are thy boasted rights—thy vaunted titles—thy imaginary honours—thy air-built castles—thy unsubstantial visions of greatness? Dissipated by a breath. Listen to me. The marriage was secret—it was without a witness—*I alone could prove it.* Now you have your answer. Tell what you have heard to the world—repeat my words—who will believe you? Try the law:

we are in possession—in power; you are poor, unfriended, unknown; no, not unknown: your character is too well known—your name is recognised as that of a desperado, familiar with vice and crime—capable of any deed, however daring. Who will credit such a tale from you? supported by such evidence as you can bring, who are already amenable to the laws of your country? Your life is at this moment forfeited, for a murderous assault committed last night, upon the keeper of my park. For this you, the elder born of Sir Piers Rookwood—the heir apparent to his title—the inheriter of his honourable name, shall suffer the extreme penalty of the law; for by the God above us, I will prosecute you—pursue you to the death. Now, braggart, solicit my mercy—implore my clemency—sue for my terms. You are my prisoner."

"*Your* prisoner! Lady Rookwood," returned Luke, laughing scornfully. "Were your mur-

derous intentions to be punished, you were mine. Thrice have you aimed at my life—twice ere this—fate has preserved me; but information of your plots has reached me. You cannot crush me; I rise again, to triumph. What hinders me, armed as I am, for I *am* armed, to compel you, at the peril of your life, to subscribe a declaration of your avowed conviction upon the spot? What hinders me, I say, but a sense that my just cause will triumph? I leave its agency to *her* who hath done thus much. Heaven will direct me—my mother will guide me."

"To the gibbet," cried Lady Rookwood—"whence nought shall rescue thee. Like all fiends, the evil spirit that hath served thee, will fail thee at the last."

"I place my trust in *her*," said Luke. At that moment his eye was riveted by the miniature, which it accidentally encountered. He stooped to raise it. It came like a confirmation, a beacon in the storm—a directing light—

he pressed it to his lips. "Did I not say so?" exclaimed he; "how else would this have fallen into my hands?"

"'Tis accident," said Lady Rookwood, amazed at the occurrence.

"*Accident!*" cried Luke; "'tis fate—the fate that presides over my doom. Was it accident last night, when the grave yielded up its dead? when she whose face and features are here pourtrayed, fresh and fair as the day whereon she breathed, were for the first time revealed to me? No! injured, sainted spirit, the hour of expiation is at hand I, thy son, will be the minister of thy retribution." Kissing the picture, he placed it next his heart.

Once or twice during this speech Lady Rookwood's glances had wandered towards the bell, as if about to summon aid, but the intention was abandoned almost as soon as formed, probably from apprehension of the consequences of any such attempt. She was not without alarm, as to the result of the interview, and was con-

sidering how she could bring it to a termination without endangering herself; and, if possible, secure at the same time the person of Luke, when the latter, turning sharply round upon her, and drawing a pistol, exclaimed—

"Follow me!"

"Whither, and for what?" answered she, in astonishment.

"To the room where lies your husband!"

"Why there? what would you do? villain! I will not trust my life with you. I will not follow you."

"Hesitate not, as you value your life. Do aught to alarm the house, and I fire. Your safety depends upon yourself. I would see his body, ere it is laid in the grave. I will not leave you here."

"Go," said Lady Rookwood; "if that be all, I pledge myself you shall not be interrupted."

"I will not take your pledge; your presence shall be my surety. By her unavenged memory, if you play me false, though all your satellites

stand around you, you die upon the spot. Obey me, and you are safe. Our way leads to the room by the private staircase—we shall pass unobserved—you see I know the road. The room, by your own command, is vacant—save of the dead. Allow me to compliment you upon your caution. We shall be alone. This done, I depart. You will then be free to act. Disobey me, and your blood be upon your own head."

"Lead on," said Lady Rookwood, pressing towards the antichamber.

"The door I mean is there," pointing to another part of the room—"that panel——"

"Ha! how know you that?"

"No matter—follow."

Luke touched a spring, and the panel flying open, disclosed a dim recess, into which Luke entered; and, seizing Lady Rookwood's hand, dragged her after him.

CHAPTER XI.

Mischief, that may be help'd, is hard to know;
And danger, going on, still multiplies.
Where harm hath many wings, care comes too late;
Yet hasty attempts make chance precipitate.
LORD BROOKE. ALAHAM.

THE "Queen's Room" formed one of a suite of apartments traversing the entire eastern wing of the Hall, the upper gallery of which was exclusively devoted, during the later years of her husband's life, to Lady Rookwood's occupation. The antiquated grandeur, and magnificent, though tarnished equipage, of these apartments, were, it may be supposed, more to her taste than the modern conveniences of other rooms, and she domineered it within them, as the

bird of night broods amidst the ruins of some desecrated fane, in silent, solitary state. None, save her ancient attendant, Agnes, was suffered to approach her chamber, without an especial summons; a prohibition which was much more satisfactorily complied with than the occasional attendance upon her Ladyship, which was also of necessity required. It has more than once been incidentally remarked, that this wing claimed an earlier date than any other part of the house; and the massive construction of its walls, as well as its distance from quarters more inhabited, rendered it impervious to sound, or disturbance of any kind, and, so far, a desirable retreat. But the same cause precluded the possibility of procuring aid, in case of any such dangerous emergency as the present. This latter consideration, however, weighed little with Lady Rookwood. Fear was unknown to her, and she required little attendance, though at all times imperatively insisting upon servile obedience.

Independently of Lady Rookwood's prohibi-

tion, there was another reason, in itself sufficient, to deter the timid of the household from venturing within the precincts of this gallery. It was reported to be haunted. Strange sights had been seen—strange sounds heard—shrieks and groans had broken the hush of midnight. One story, in particular, of a headless lady, robed in white, who rushed along the passage each night, and disappeared at a certain spot, obtained universal credence. This figure, was said to be that of one of the unfortunate ladies of Rookwood, whose head was thrown into the dark cellars beneath this part of the building, while the decollated trunk was buried in solemn pomp in the family-vault, whence it was supposed to glide, at midnight, in search of its mutilated remains.

Thus ran the legend, which kept alive, and seemingly corroborated, the subsequent superstition. The rooms composing the haunted wing, had for years been occupied as dormitories, by the heads of the house; within

their gloomy confines many a beautiful dame had slept—ay, slept her last. The luckless Susan Bradley expired therein; two of Sir Reginald's spouses had died in the same apartment, and many others before them. A dismal catalogue of horrors were added. Something mysterious and dreadful was told of the fate of all these ladies. Their injured shades were supposed to "revisit the pale glimpses of the moon, making night hideous" within these chambers; and several guests, who had been placed therein, were frightened out of their senses. In consequence of this, the range of rooms had for some time been closed up, and few of the household would venture thither alone after dusk, especially the maidens; and, if compelled to do so, how did their hearts palpitate with fear, if the old stairs creaked beneath their footsteps, a door suddenly flapped together at the end of the gallery, or a bat darted by accident against the window!

The recess upon which the panel opened, had been a small oratory, and though entirely

disused, still retained its cushions and its crucifix. There were two other entrances to this place of prayer; the one communicating with a further bed-chamber, the other leading to the gallery. Through the latter, after closing the aperture, without relinquishing his grasp, Luke passed.

It was growing rapidly dark, and at the brightest seasons this gloomy corridor was but imperfectly lighted from narrow windows that looked into the old, quadrangular court-yard below; and as they issued from the oratory a dazzling flash of lightning (a storm having suddenly arisen) momentarily illumined the whole length of the passage, disclosing the retreating figure of a man at the other extremity of the gallery. Lady Rookwood uttered an outcry for assistance, but the man, whoever he might be, disappeared in the instantaneously succeeding gloom, leaving her in doubt whether or not her situation had been perceived. Luke had seen the figure at the same instant; and, not without apprehensions lest his plans should be defeated, he

griped Lady Rookwood's arm still more strictly, and placing the muzzle of the pistol to her breast, hurried her rapidly forwards. Descending a spiral staircase, which led winding from the gallery to the lower story, the sound of voices, in conversation, were distinctly heard through the thin partition which separated them from the speakers.

"A word, and 'tis your last," whispered Luke, pressing the pistol to her side.

Nothing doubting, from the determined fierceness of his manner, that he would make good his words, and trusting still to some fortuitous occurrence for deliverance, Lady Rookwood, now within call, though not within reach, of assistance, was silent. A loud laugh proceeded from the parties in the chamber, and with that instinctive quickness with which everybody recognises the familiar sound, she heard her own name pronounced, coupled with an epithet which sounded any thing but polite, as applied to a lady. She had no difficulty in distinguishing

the tones of the voice to be those of Mr. Titus Tyrconnel.

Luke lingered. The language of the speakers seemed such as to assure him of his security, and he was not unwilling that Lady Rookwood should hear an unbiassed opinion of herself and of her conduct.

"I wonder how long the ould Jezabel will keep us out of the state room?" continued Titus, for it was he.

"Can't say, indeed," returned another voice, which Lady Rookwood knew at once to be Mr. Coates's; "till midnight, most likely, unless *he* prevents it. For my part, I wonder what the devil takes her there, unless, between ourselves, she wishes to be beforehand with the old gentleman—ha! ha! one would think she'd never have gone there of her own accord. However, as I said before, she's got somebody to manage her, now."

"Ay! ay!" answered Titus, "that youngster will see she does no mischief, he'll take her in

hand now; he'll have all properly done, for his father's sake. By St. Patrick, only to think of his coming upon us so unawares. I've not half recovered my surprise yet."

"What will Lady Rookwood say, I wonder, when she sees him," replied Coates; "she'd no notion whatever of it; I'm sure it will come upon her like a clap of thunder. I wonder how he got his information—that puzzles me. I thought he was too much out of the way to have heard——"

"That's what bothers me," replied Titus. "How *did* he learn it? But what matters that. Here he is—he's master now; and if he takes my advice, he'll soon make the house clane of her presence. I'll give him a helping hand, with all the pleasure in life."

"While on that subject," returned the other, "there's one thing more I've got to say—but you'll be silent—I wouldn't have it reach her ears for the world, at least, as coming from me; though, perhaps, it might be as well she did

learn a little that's said behind her back. You must know——"

"Pass on," interrupted Lady Rookwood; "I will not stay to hear myself reviled; or," thought she, "are these, also, in his confidence? The plot is deeper than I dream'd of."

Equally surprised with herself at the conversation he had overheard, which appeared to refer to his own situation, though he could in nowise conceive how the speakers obtained their information, unless from the incautious loquacity of Peter Bradley, Luke had listened in silent wonder. The coincidence was, indeed, curious, and affected both parties in different degrees. On the one hand, Luke, though perplexed and astounded, was inspired by confidence; while, on the other, Lady Rookwood was filled with dismay and indignation. Ever distrustful of all around her, she was satisfied that Coates had clandestinely possessed himself of the secret of Luke's legitimacy, and of the fact of the marriage, by breaking the seal of the

package, and that he had subsequently betrayed it. It was difficult, indeed, to reconcile this notion with the delivery of the papers to her, together with the inclosure of the all-important certificate; but of the existence of a confederacy against her she felt fully convinced. Thus doubting, thus misgiving, her vindictive soul was busied in framing schemes for the overthrow of their plans, and the execution of her own revengeful purposes. Whelming as the ocean, came the full tide of her wrath; and could she at that moment have commanded that raging element to arise and destroy, her furious impulse would have prompted her to confound her supposed enemies and herself in one common fate. With some such thought, determined, though she should seal her own doom, to defeat their plans, did Lady Rookwood suffer herself to be conducted.

All was now in total obscurity—neither countenance could be perceived, as they trod the dark passage; but Luke's unrelaxed grasp indicated

no change in his purposes, nor did the slow, dignified march of the lady betray any apprehension on her part. Their way lay beneath the entrance hall. It was a means of communication little used, crossing from one side of the hall to the other, and received no light, but what was afforded from above. Their tread sounded hollowly on the flagged floor—no other sound was heard. Mounting a staircase, similar to the one from which they had just descended, they arrived at another passage. A few paces brought them to a door. Luke turned the handle, and they stood within the chamber of the dead.

The reader is already aware of the custom observed by the Rookwood family, respecting the solemnization of their funeral obsequies, at midnight, and by torch light. It remains to inform him of another practice, not so rare, namely, the laying of the corpse in state, upon the night of the burial. There was, however, a revolting peculiarity attending this observance. Placed

within its shell, the body was never soldered down, until after the grisly mass had been exposed to the gaze of the tenantry; and, in consequence of the horrible exhibitions of which he had heard, and indeed seen, express directions were left by Sir Piers, that his remains should be embalmed, immediately after his demise. In addition to this, was the disposition of an unusual allowance of wine and wassail to the tenantry, it being Sir Piers's opinion, that human nature, even in grief, requires support; and that, with every glass he swallows, the regret of the mourner waxes deeper, and more sympathetic, and his laments louder and more long. And that he was right, the event proved. No Lord of Rookwood had been half so liberal, or was half so much regretted; and if sighs could waft him thither, the worthy Squire was already safe in "Arthur's bosom—if ever man went to Arthur's bosom." His instructions had been more than fulfilled by Titus Tyrconnel. Brimmers of strong ale, goblets of choice wines, flasks

of more potent liquors, together with a goodly supply of baked meats, and other viands, were at the service of every comer; and now, having eaten and drunken their fill, all were desirous of taking a last farewell of him to whom they were indebted for their entertainment; nor, perhaps, at the same time, without desire to behold a spectacle, which had formed, for many days, the chief topic of conversation in the neighbourhood—the body lying in solemn state. For this purpose they had congregated in the hall, before a door that opened into the room in which the body was placed; but all admission having been refused, by the commands of Lady Rookwood, until ten o'clock, as it wanted some quarter of an hour to that time, the mutes, who were stationed at the door, dared not, for their lives, permit any one to enter.

The room which contained the remains of poor Sir Piers, was arrayed in all that mockery of state, which, vainly attempting to deride death, is, itself, a bitter derision of the living. It was the

one devoted to the principal meals of the day—a strange choice, but convenience had dictated its adoption by those with whom this part of the ceremonial had originated, and long custom had rendered its usage, for this purpose, almost prescriptive. This room, which was of some size, had originally formed part of the great hall, from which it was divided by a thick screen of dark lustrously varnished oak, enriched with fanciful figures, carved in bold relief. The walls were panelled with the same embrowned material, and sustained sundry portraits of the members of the family, in every style and fashion of investiture, from the steely trappings of Sir Ranulph, down to the courtly costume of Sir Reginald. Most of the race were ranged around the room; and, seen in the red light shed upon their features by the flaring wax flambeaux, they looked like an array of solemn silent witnesses, gazing upon their departed descendant. The sides of the chamber were hung with black,

from the sur-base to the floor, and upon a bier in the middle of the room rested the body. A wide and ample pall of rich, sable velvet was spread over the supporters of the yet unclosed coffin. Broad escutcheons, decked out in glowing colours, pompously set forth the heraldic honours of the departed. Tall lights burnt at the head and feet, and fragrant perfumes diffused their odours from silver censers. But that which suggested the most painful reflection of all, to those who had known him, was the consideration that, in this very room—nay, on the very spot where he now rested an inanimate heap, surrounded with all the insignia of mortality, had Sir Piers caroused and made glad, with health and spirits, and friends to boot; where he was now, silent and laid low, had he shouted, till the rafters had rung again, with his boisterous merriment. Another hour, and even this room should have lost all trace of him. It had been the theatre of his revelry and rejoicing,

through the rough drama of his life; it was meet, that the last scene of his earthly pilgrimage should close there likewise.

The entrance of Luke and his unwilling companion had been abrupt. The transition from darkness to the glare of light, was almost blinding, and they had advanced far into the room ere Lady Rookwood perceived a man, whom she took to be one of the mutes, leaning over the bier, before her. The coffin-lid was entirely removed, and the person, whose back was towards them, appeared to be wrapt in mournful contemplation of the sad spectacle within. Suddenly bursting from Luke's hold, Lady Rookwood rushed forwards with a scream, and touched the man's shoulder. He started at the summons, and disclosed the features of her son!

Rapidly as her own act, Luke followed. He levelled the pistol at her head, but his hand dropped to his side, as he encountered the glance of Ranulph. All three seemed paralysed by surprise. Ranulph, in astonishment, extended

his arm to his mother, who, placing one arm over his shoulder, pointed with the other to Luke; the latter stared sternly and inquiringly at both—yet none spake.

END OF VOL. I.

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